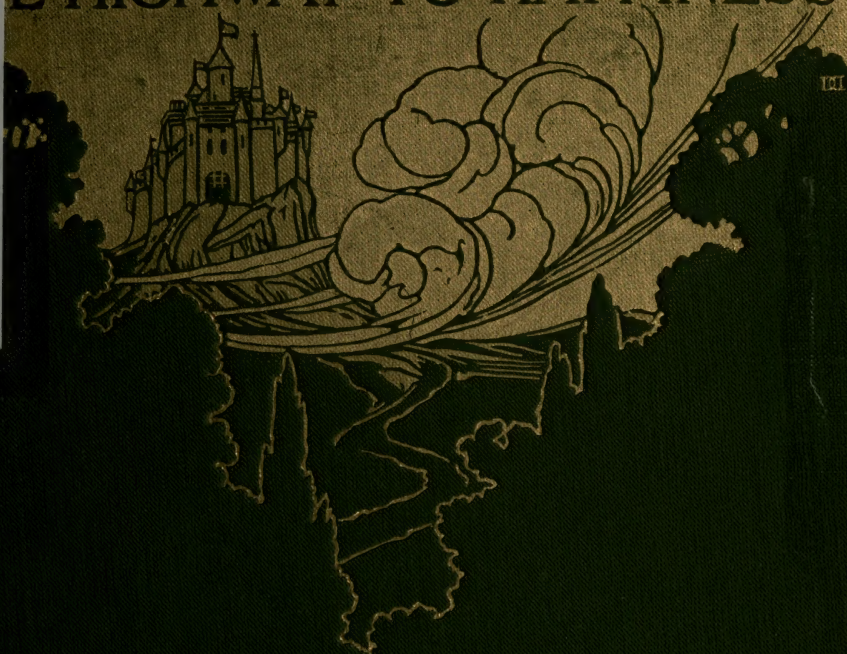




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THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS



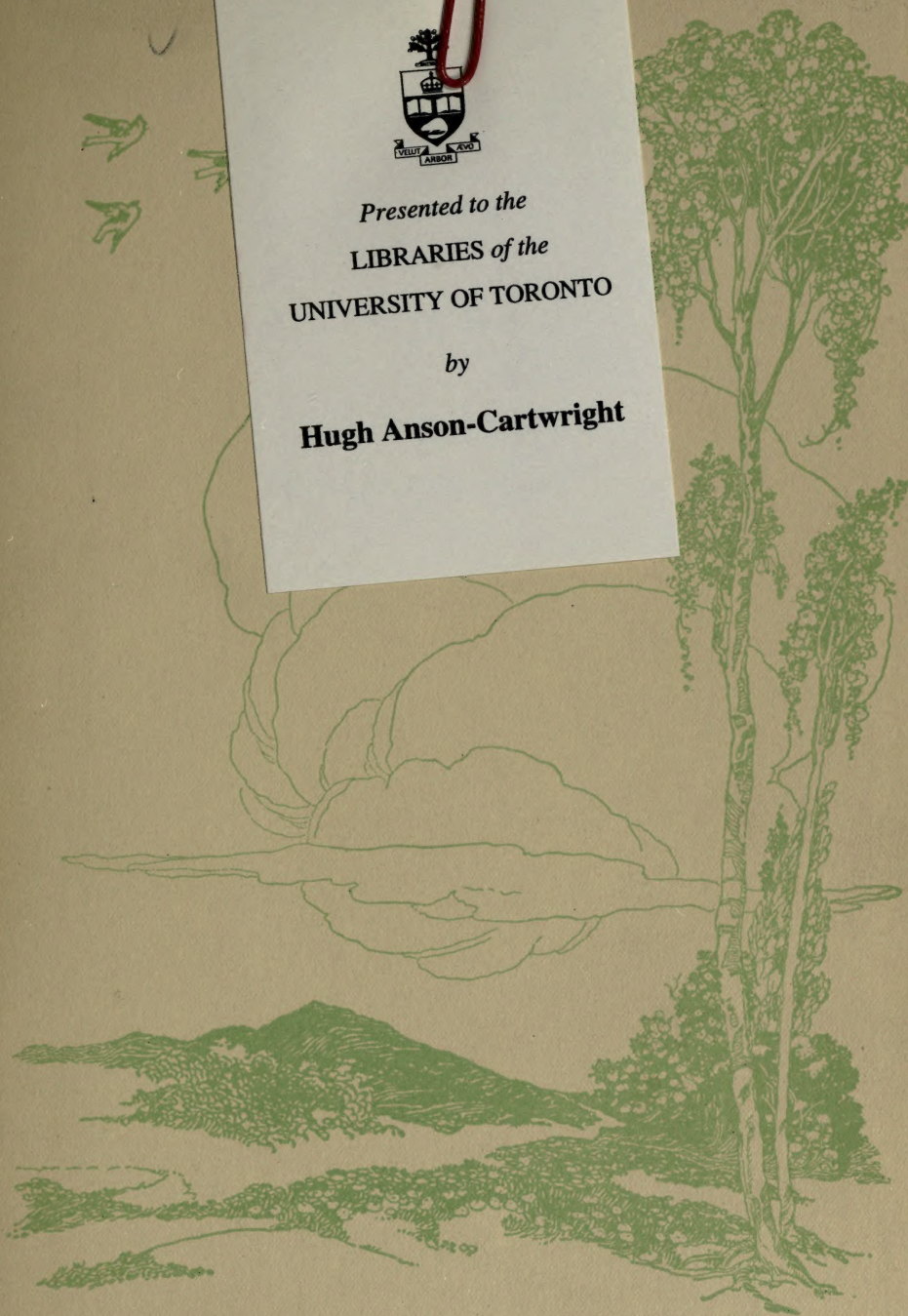
RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

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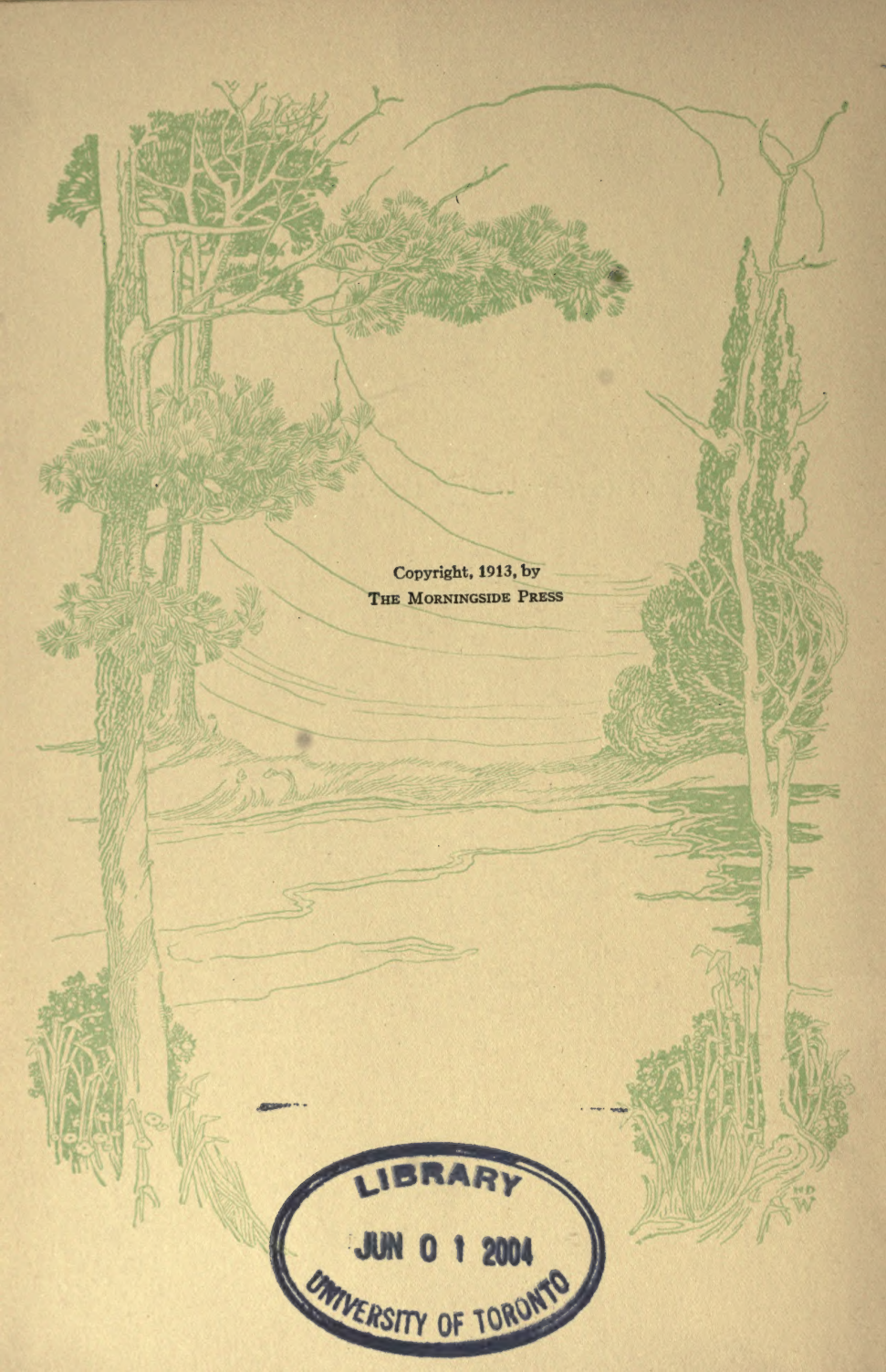


THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

By RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

DECORATIONS BY
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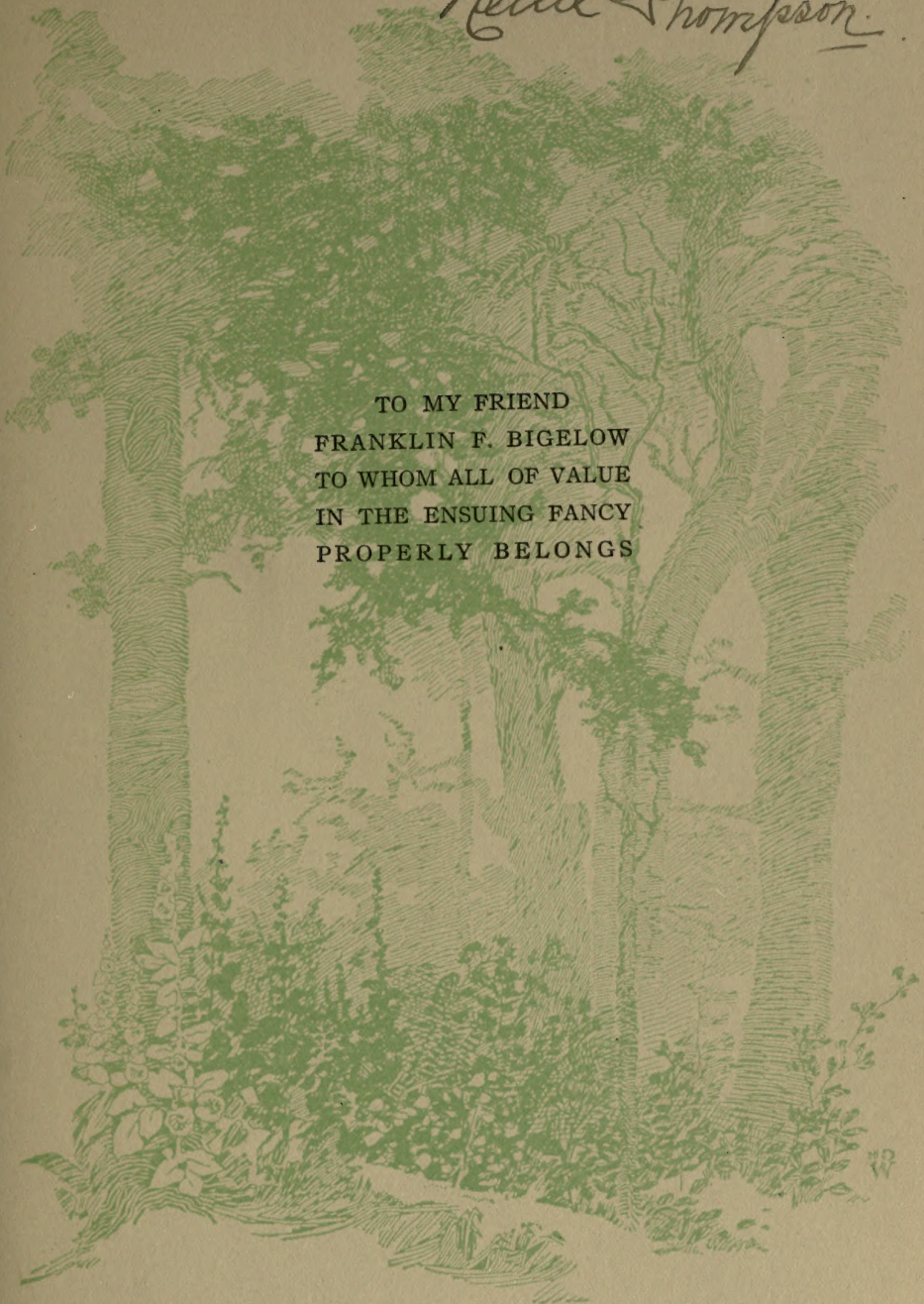


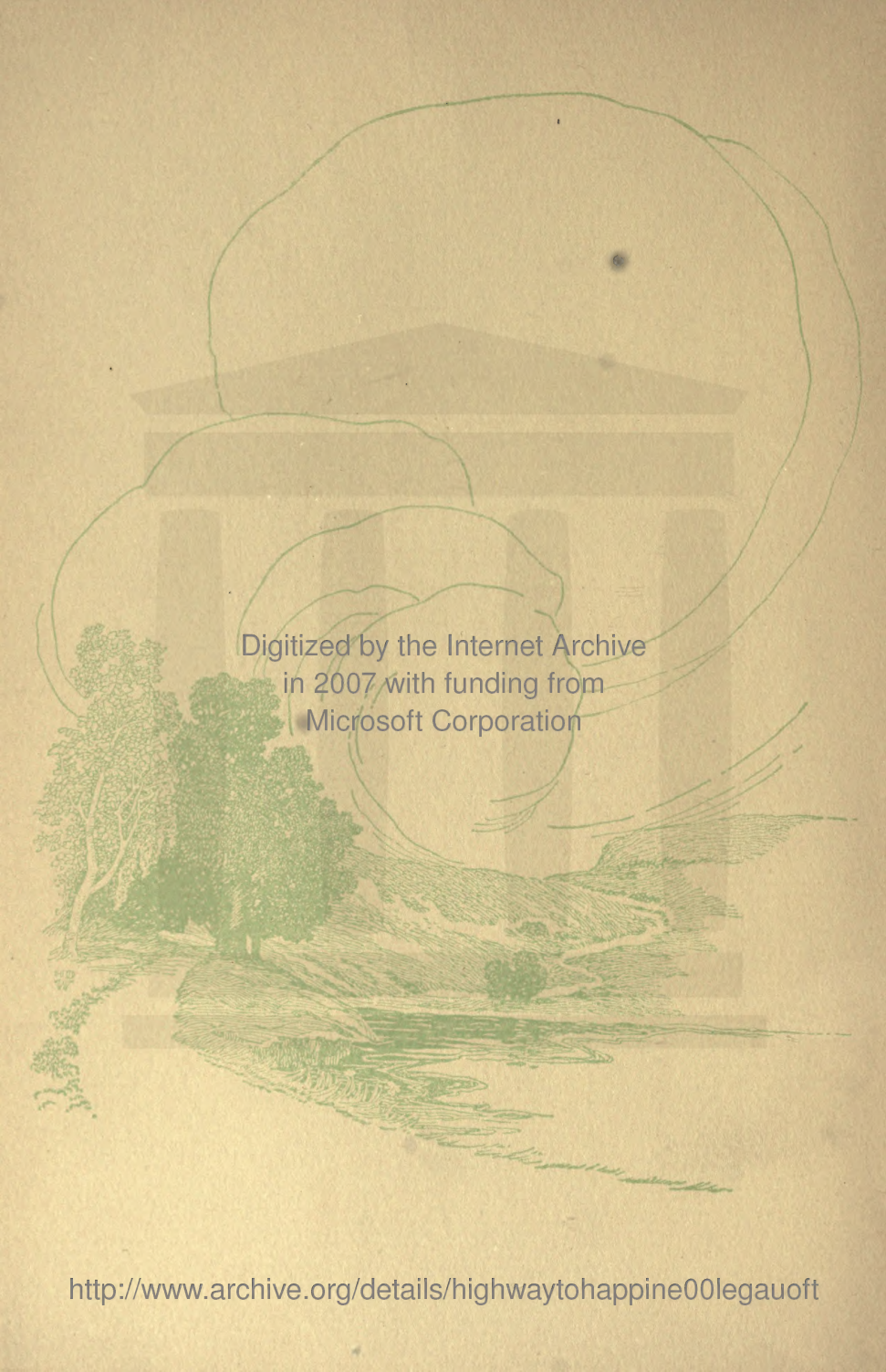
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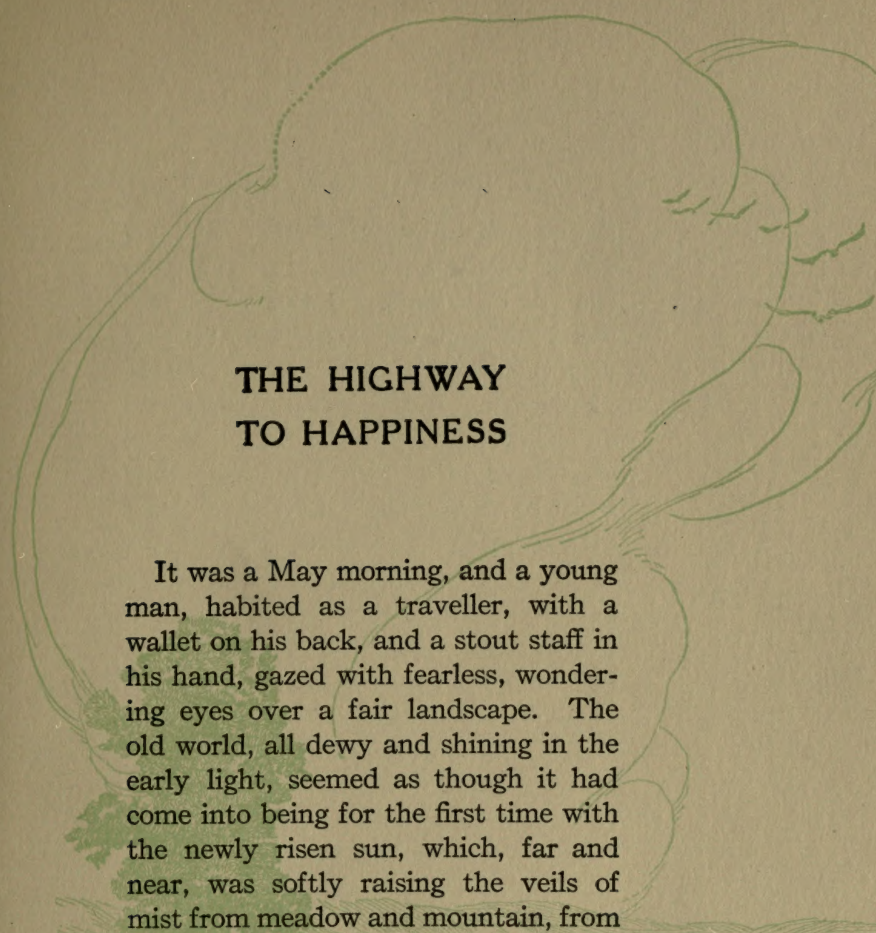
Nellie Thompson.

TO MY FRIEND
FRANKLIN F. BIGELOW
TO WHOM ALL OF VALUE
IN THE ENSUING FANCY
PROPERLY BELONGS



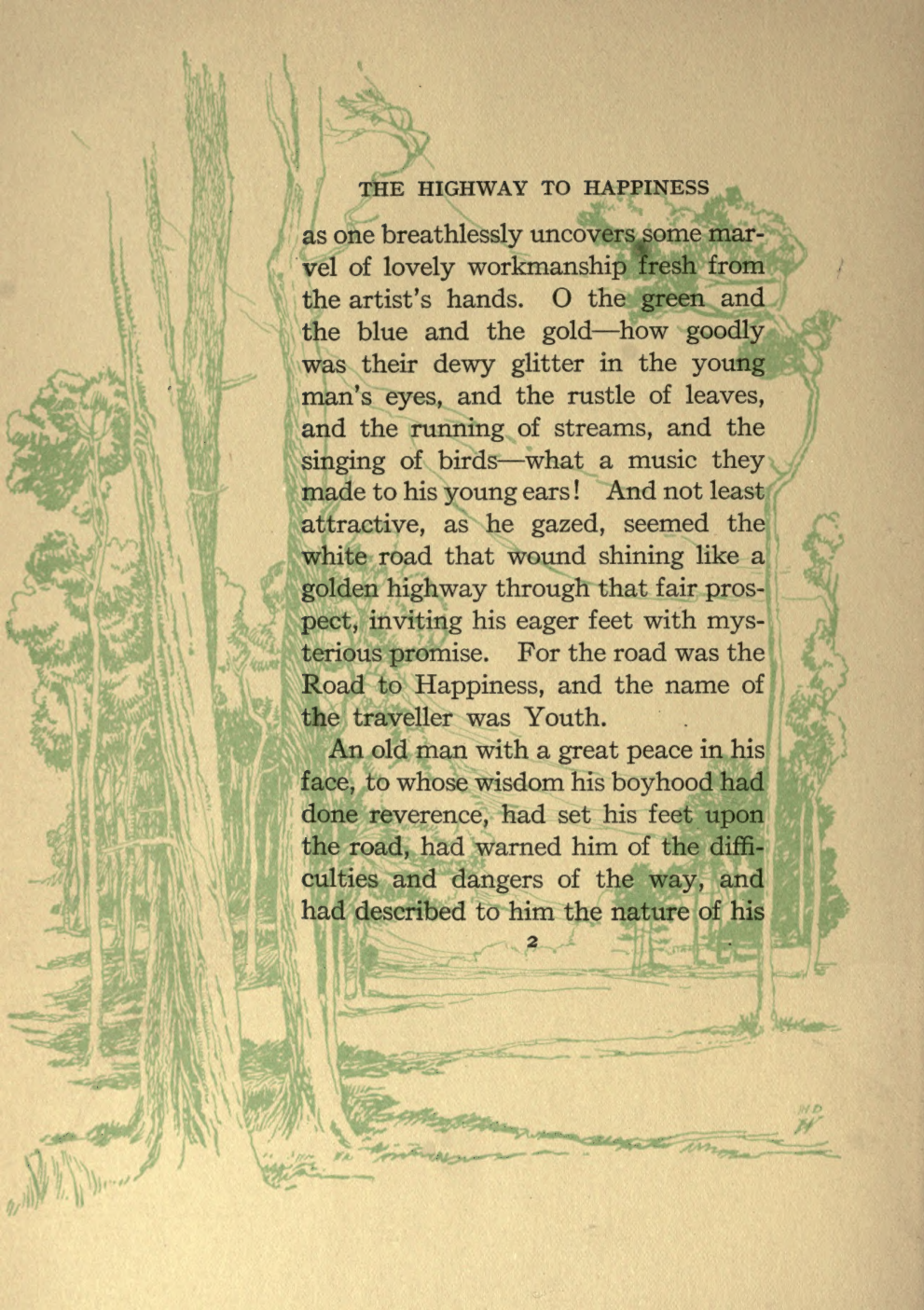


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THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

It was a May morning, and a young man, habited as a traveller, with a wallet on his back, and a stout staff in his hand, gazed with fearless, wondering eyes over a fair landscape. The old world, all dewy and shining in the early light, seemed as though it had come into being for the first time with the newly risen sun, which, far and near, was softly raising the veils of mist from meadow and mountain, from blossoming bush and solemn woodland,



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

as one breathlessly uncovers some marvel of lovely workmanship fresh from the artist's hands. O the green and the blue and the gold—how goodly was their dewy glitter in the young man's eyes, and the rustle of leaves, and the running of streams, and the singing of birds—what a music they made to his young ears! And not least attractive, as he gazed, seemed the white road that wound shining like a golden highway through that fair prospect, inviting his eager feet with mysterious promise. For the road was the Road to Happiness, and the name of the traveller was Youth.

An old man with a great peace in his face, to whose wisdom his boyhood had done reverence, had set his feet upon the road, had warned him of the difficulties and dangers of the way, and had described to him the nature of his

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

destination. The old man had made for him a writing on a scroll, which he carried in his wallet; a writing, however, which he was not to read till he found himself in trouble or doubt. "For," said the old man, "till that time comes, you will find no meaning in what is written, and it may well be that you shall have no need to read in the writing at all. Keep true to the friends you take with you, and you can scarcely miss the way."

The friends of whom the old man had spoken stood near the young man as he gazed along the golden highway, shading his eyes that they might pierce further into the mysterious dazzle of the beckoning distance. They too were girded for a journey with packs and staves, and one was a youth dressed in pure white, of a singular sweetness and gravity of demeanor, and his



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

name was Virtue; and another was a youth habited in homespun brown, very sturdy and honest of mien, and his name was Truth; and a third, clothed in a garment of strangely living blue, very steadfast of carriage and true-eyed, was called Faith; and yet a fourth there was gaily attired in green as fresh and vivid as that of the first shoots of spring, a creature with almost girlishly happy ways, yet very dauntless looking withal, and the name of this fellow was Hope.

Presently Youth turned to his companions.

"Before we start out upon our journey," said he, "let us make a vow of fellowship, to stay by each other, whatever happens, to be true to each other till the ending of the way."

And he touched each of his friends

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

on the shoulder by turns, and bade them swear.

"I swear to be true to you," said Virtue, "by the whiteness of snow, and the holiness of the stars."

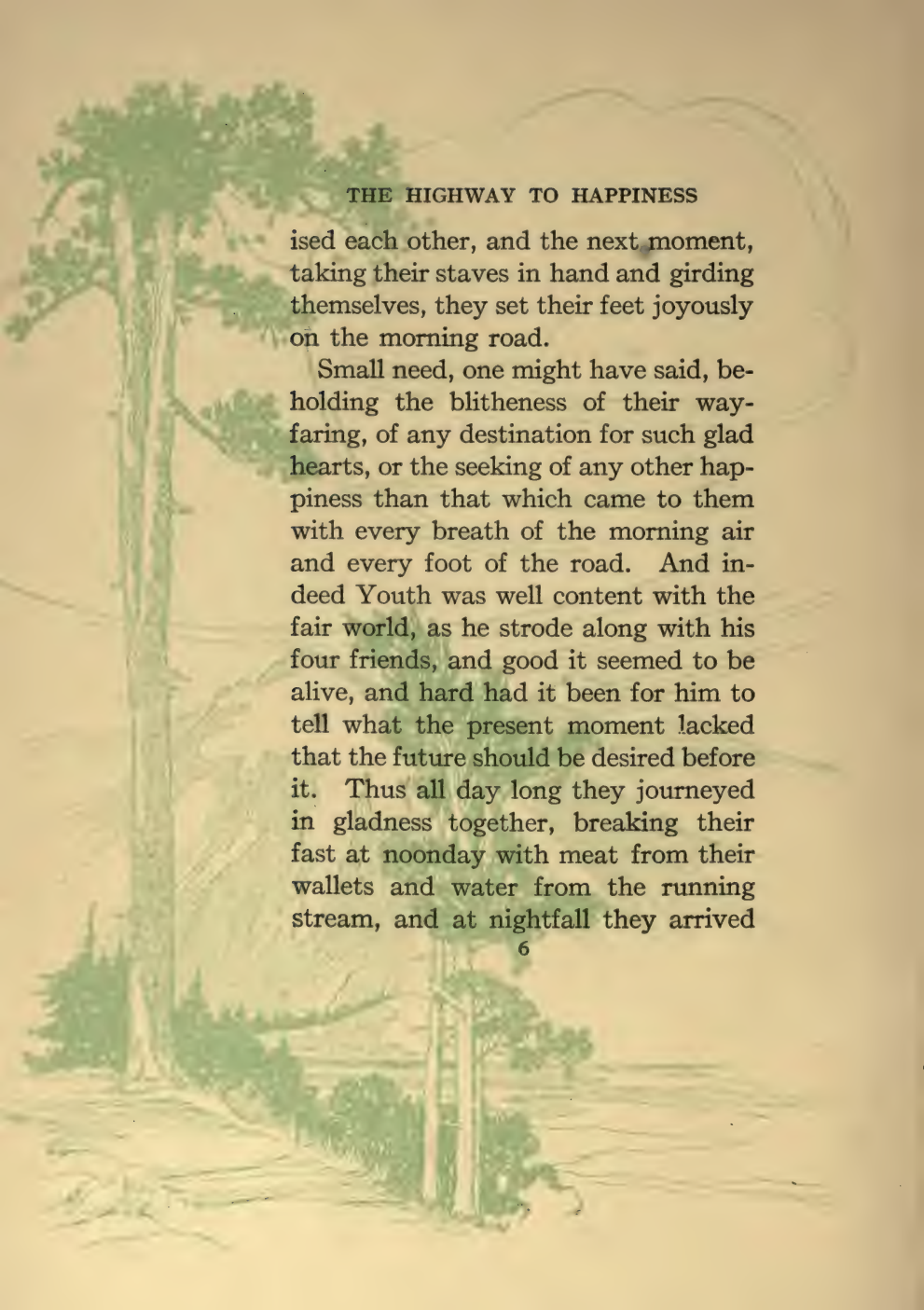
"I swear to be true to you," said Truth, "on the word of a man."

"I swear to be true to you," said Faith, "by my trust in the goodness of God."

"And I," laughed Hope, "swear to be true to you by my faith in the rainbow."

"But we cannot be true to you," said they all, "unless you be true to us; you must swear also." And Youth raised his hand and said, "I swear to be true to you all by the kindness of my mother's eyes."

They stood with bowed heads for a space, as though silently promising their own hearts what they had prom-




THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

ised each other, and the next moment, taking their staves in hand and girding themselves, they set their feet joyously on the morning road.

Small need, one might have said, beholding the blitheness of their way-faring, of any destination for such glad hearts, or the seeking of any other happiness than that which came to them with every breath of the morning air and every foot of the road. And indeed Youth was well content with the fair world, as he strode along with his four friends, and good it seemed to be alive, and hard had it been for him to tell what the present moment lacked that the future should be desired before it. Thus all day long they journeyed in gladness together, breaking their fast at noonday with meat from their wallets and water from the running stream, and at nightfall they arrived

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

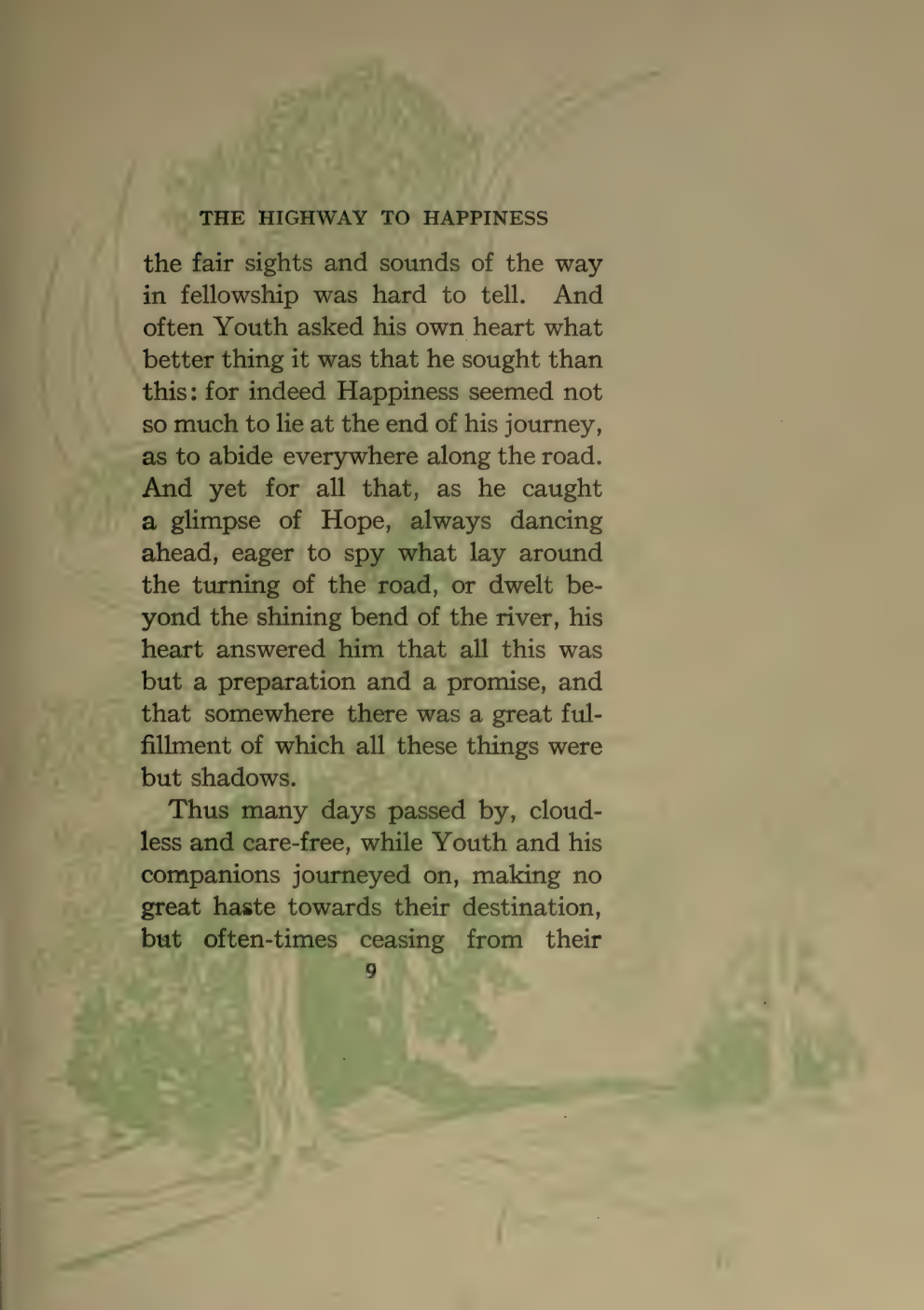
at an inn pleasantly weary, and ate mightily of the good country fare which the landlord spread before them, and slept wondrously in the white lavendered beds, their dreams filled with the open-air sweetness of the day that had gone by. On the morrow, the sun was scarce above the tree-tops before they too were up and fresh-eyed and eager for the road. The landlord stood in the doorway to bid them god-speed on their way. He was a man of middle years, neither glad nor sad of countenance, but with a kindly, worn face, as of one who is somewhat weary, and yet not ill content. His name was Experience, and he had great knowledge of the road and its wayfarers. But he spake little of all that he knew, particularly to those who were setting forth on the journey, for such, he had noted, paid small heed to his words.



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

Only those who, sad-hearted and foot-sore, came from the other direction were glad of them. And of those he was held in much esteem and affection, for a certain rare skill in leech-craft, as well as for the excellency and comfort of his hostelry. But Youth and his companions saw in him but an oldish, kindly man, sapless and silent; while he, for his part, marked their lit faces and gay going with a sorrowful smile, and, watching them till they disappeared at a bend of the road, turned indoors with a sigh.

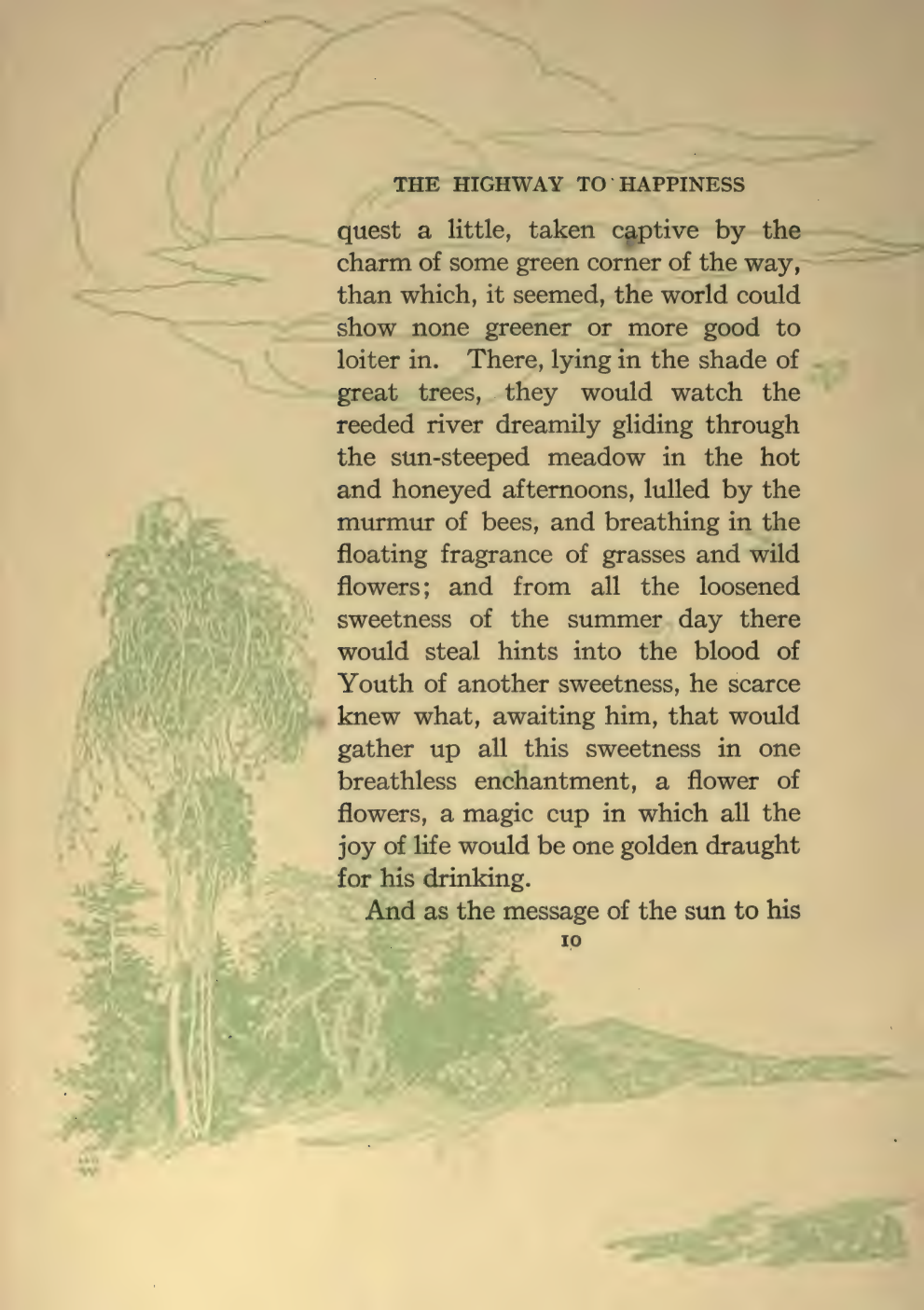
For Youth and his friends the new day passed even as the day before, with sunshine and singing of birds, and running of streams, and ever the road bravely winding ahead, between flowery meadow and glimmering woodland; and what there was to ask of life better than to breathe the good air, and love



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

the fair sights and sounds of the way in fellowship was hard to tell. And often Youth asked his own heart what better thing it was that he sought than this: for indeed Happiness seemed not so much to lie at the end of his journey, as to abide everywhere along the road. And yet for all that, as he caught a glimpse of Hope, always dancing ahead, eager to spy what lay around the turning of the road, or dwelt beyond the shining bend of the river, his heart answered him that all this was but a preparation and a promise, and that somewhere there was a great fulfillment of which all these things were but shadows.

Thus many days passed by, cloudless and care-free, while Youth and his companions journeyed on, making no great haste towards their destination, but often-times ceasing from their



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

quest a little, taken captive by the charm of some green corner of the way, than which, it seemed, the world could show none greener or more good to loiter in. There, lying in the shade of great trees, they would watch the reeded river dreamily gliding through the sun-steeped meadow in the hot and honeyed afternoons, lulled by the murmur of bees, and breathing in the floating fragrance of grasses and wild flowers; and from all the loosened sweetness of the summer day there would steal hints into the blood of Youth of another sweetness, he scarce knew what, awaiting him, that would gather up all this sweetness in one breathless enchantment, a flower of flowers, a magic cup in which all the joy of life would be one golden draught for his drinking.

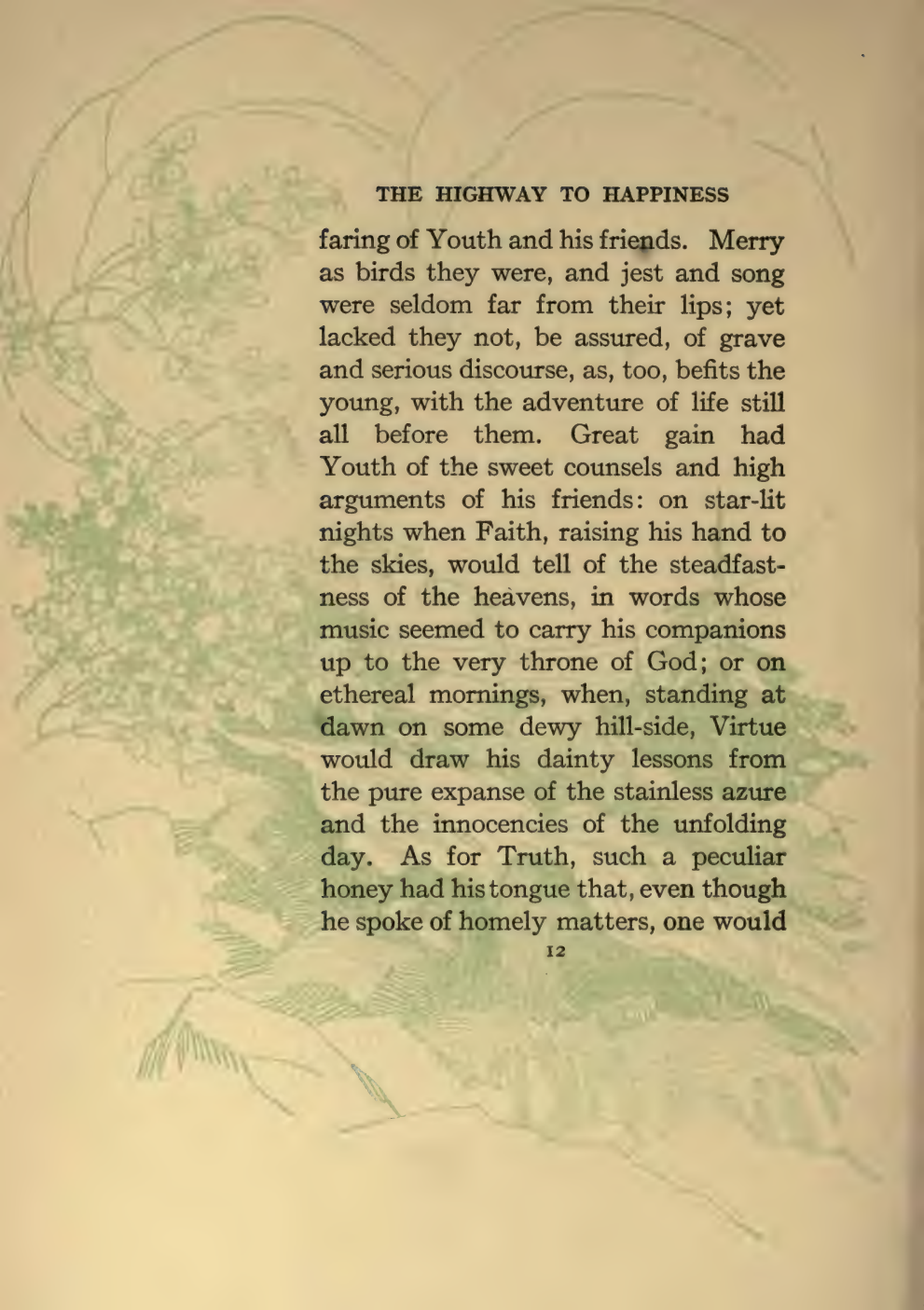
And as the message of the sun to his

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

dreaming blood, so was the message of the moon to his soul. Often he would stand, as one entranced, watching her walking through the woodland with her feet of pearl, or gaze, night-long, at her lovely haunted face in the mirror of some lonely lake. Yet her beauty would seem to be speaking to his soul of a beauty still holier than hers, her face to be the mirror of a face more fair.

For as yet Youth had not looked upon the face of Love—that face of which all the joy and beauty of the world are but symbol and prophecy. Therefore it was, though he knew it not, that he was still drawn along the road; nor, fair as were the green places on its margin, made of any his abiding place.

Gay, as has been said, and as be-seemed young hearts, was the way-



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

faring of Youth and his friends. Merry as birds they were, and jest and song were seldom far from their lips; yet lacked they not, be assured, of grave and serious discourse, as, too, befits the young, with the adventure of life still all before them. Great gain had Youth of the sweet counsels and high arguments of his friends: on star-lit nights when Faith, raising his hand to the skies, would tell of the steadfastness of the heavens, in words whose music seemed to carry his companions up to the very throne of God; or on ethereal mornings, when, standing at dawn on some dewy hill-side, Virtue would draw his dainty lessons from the pure expanse of the stainless azure and the innocencies of the unfolding day. As for Truth, such a peculiar honey had his tongue that, even though he spoke of homely matters, one would

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

have said that it was none other than Beauty that was the talker. The manner of Hope, as you would guess, was to put his pretty wisdom into a song; and, indeed, the bright creature was always singing, usually unseen, ahead of his companions, or sometimes perched in the tree-tops like a bird.

Nor did Youth and his friends forget God and his saints, but at night and morn bowed their heads in wayside chapels, and brought offerings of wild-flowers to the simple shrines that guarded with holy presences the traveler on his wandering way. For very truly to the thought of Youth the world was God's world, and life in it a divine opportunity, which it was possible wonderfully to use and tragically to miss. Each man, his mother of the kind eyes had told him, carried within his bosom a light which burnt bright

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

or dim as he remembered or forgot whose world it was, and to what end he was strangely in it—and that light was his soul. To bring back that light to God at the end of life's journey, shining more brightly than at the setting-out—that was man's mysterious ordeal in this world. And to Youth, with his clean heart, and his pure, unsullied strength, it seemed no hard matter of which his mother had told, for the light in his bosom burned so clearly of itself, and his very body seemed to lend it fuel, as though the lamp and the flame should be one. Indeed, with Youth it was as to body and soul as it is with some flowers, the green stalk so gradually whitening into the ivory of the flower that it is impossible to say where the one ends and the other begins.

One afternoon, it chanced that Youth

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

had wandered ahead of his companions, and he came to a place where the road forked suddenly, so that for a moment he stood in doubt as to which was the main road and which the by-way; but, as he looked close, he saw that there was a certain waywardness and wildness about the one, as though careless of its destination, whereas the other had more the look of purposeful travel, as though making for some well-defined end. Yet the wayward road wore a strangely seductive air of invitation, as though it wound into the mysterious green heart of the world. The trees grew more luxuriantly there than along the other road, and the sunlight, falling here and there through the branches, lit up alluring secrecies of green sward, or in dim recesses fired with magic radiance some exquisite lonely flower. The road seemed under

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

a spell, breathless and beautiful, and seemed to say to the heart that all the sweetness of the world was hidden somewhere in its fairy windings.

Youth looked about him for his companions, but they were nowhere to be seen.

"Laggards!" he said to himself, smiling: "I will explore this lovely lane a little, while I wait for them to catch me up . . . yet I would they were here to try the adventure with me." Something, he knew not what, in the strange fairness of the road stirred a sense of fear in his heart; and, as he looked inward at the white light in his bosom, it seemed as though a shadow passed over it. But a breeze, like a sigh of happiness, suddenly whispered languorously through the trees, wafting with it breaths of such fragrance that his senses grew faint with the

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

sweetness, and, ere he knew that he had moved, he found himself far down the silent lane, and the highway no longer in sight. The land wound in and out, losing itself in ferny hollows, and passing as through tunnels of green beneath the shade of great over-arching trees, and often, like the tributaries of a stream, other paths strayed away from it hither and thither into remoter secrecies of glimmering green silence. So, presently, he found himself in a maze of woodland paths where a man might well lose himself in the leafy pleasantness; and, at length, at a turning of the way there opened out before him with dazzling loveliness a lake all starred over with blue lotuses rising from the hush of their great scroll-like leaves. At the edge of the lake ran a strip of green sward pleasantly shadowed by overhanging rocks,



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

clustered with fantastic vines; and on the sward, gazing at the lake and its flowers, lovely as a statue, stood a beautiful naked girl. Her hair was of the color of poppies, and the beams of the afternoon sun filled it with a golden mist, wrapping her whole body with soft radiance, and lying tender as moonlight in the hollow of her ivory breasts. The boy stood and looked at her in a dream, and it seemed as if his heart must break with the vision of her loveliness. Awhile he hung entranced at the edge of the wood, and still she stood there, as though unconscious of his presence. But, after a little, she turned her head, and it seemed as if the whole world was suddenly filled with the blueness of her eyes. He saw the lotuses no more. It was as though all their blueness was brimming there under her strange poppy-colored hair.

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

And, as though the moon should suddenly speak out of the silent sky, he was aware that her beauty had called him by his name, and stretched towards him wonderful white arms.

"You have come at last, you beautiful boy," she said; "I have been waiting for you these many days."

And as one walking in his sleep, he moved towards her, and the blueness of her eyes folded him about like deep waters, and the hollow of her breasts was like a fragrant valley white with dew-drenched narcissus in the spring. Terribly sweet was the touch of her hands, cool as the stems of water-plants, and her hair falling about him was like a cloud of perfume, taking captive his young senses, so that he shook with the honey of her nearness, and the life seemed to be failing out of him for very joy.



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

"Come," said she after a little while, "and see the home I have made for us here among the rocks;" and smiling gently at him out of the cave of her hair, she led him to a little wattled bower woven like a nest in a grotto hard by. Wild roses and honeysuckles and tendrilled vines clambered about it, and within was a bed made of moss and sweet-smelling rushes canopied with blossoming boughs. Near at hand stood a vessel of gold laden with strangely colored fruits and flagons and drinking cups. Then she took the pack from his shoulders, sister-like, and bade him rest him after his journey, and poured out wine the color of rubies into one of the cups and gave him to drink, and drank daintily thereof herself. But the boy gazed at her as one enchanted, and had no words, but took her hair in his

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

hands wonderingly, and touched her breasts with shy awe. At that she laughed softly, and drew him to her and kissed him with the red blossom of her mouth, and again the life failed in him for joy, for it seemed as if heaven with all its stars was falling into his heart. But, as he lay lost amid her sweetness, suddenly it seemed to him that he heard voices calling him from afar, the voices of his friends.

"Surely I hear voices," he cried dreamily.

"It is only the wind among the cypresses," she answered, "there is no one else in the world but you and me." And she drew his head between her breasts, and covered him with her hair, and kissed him with lips as cool as snow and hot as fruit on a sunny wall. And as she kissed him, the voices faded away and there



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

was nothing in the world but her mouth.

Then, after a space, the moon came floating across the sleeping lotuses, and it shone on the face of Youth, where he lay asleep in a net of poppy-colored hair. But along the moonlit high-road there were four friends who slept not.

The morning star was hanging like a great crystal tear over the unfolding lotus blossoms when Youth awoke and stirred in his soft prison, and marvelled at the white arms that twined about him, and the great eye-lashed lids still closed in sleep, and the pop-pied hair, and the red rose mouth sweeter than any rose. What was this magic sleeping flower lying at his side? And as he marvelled, the eyelids lifted suddenly, as though touched by a secret spring, and two pools of azure

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

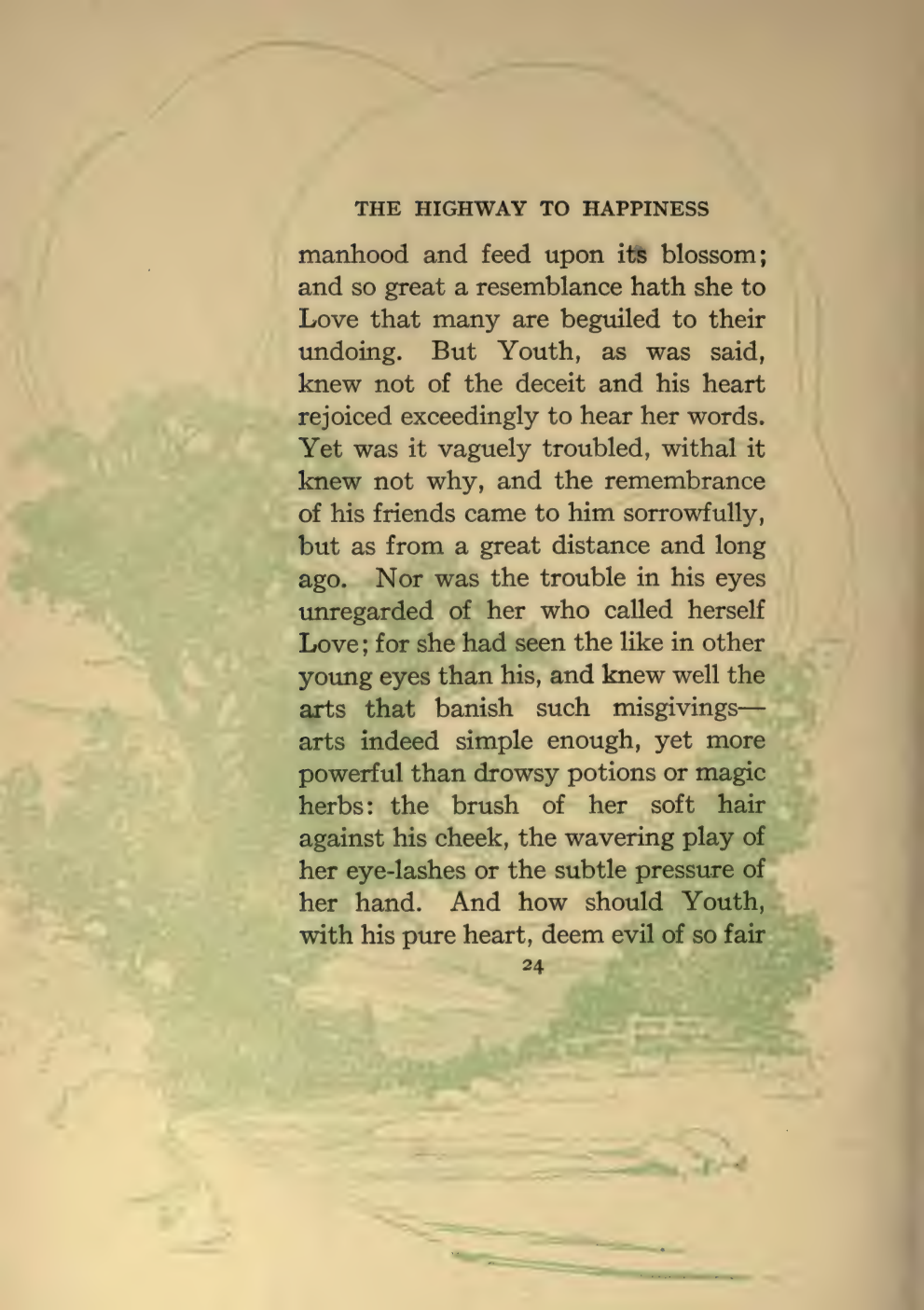
lay beneath his gaze across which the sleepy mists of morning trailed. Then the lips parted with a smile and the flower spake.

"Beloved!" it said, "beloved! another day dawns for our love."

And Youth answered, "Surely art thou She who was promised me in the dreams of the night, whose voice I have heard calling me in the spring woods, whose face I have watched for in the rising of the moon. Art thou not she whose name is Love?"

And the fairness answered, "I am Love."

Now, though Youth knew it not, this was the speech of a lie, and she who spoke was not Love, but was by some called Pleasure, and by some Lust, a beautiful evil witch that lies in wait upon the high-road to happiness, to ensnare the innocence of young



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

manhood and feed upon its blossom; and so great a resemblance hath she to Love that many are beguiled to their undoing. But Youth, as was said, knew not of the deceit and his heart rejoiced exceedingly to hear her words. Yet was it vaguely troubled, withal it knew not why, and the remembrance of his friends came to him sorrowfully, but as from a great distance and long ago. Nor was the trouble in his eyes unregarded of her who called herself Love; for she had seen the like in other young eyes than his, and knew well the arts that banish such misgivings—arts indeed simple enough, yet more powerful than drowsy potions or magic herbs: the brush of her soft hair against his cheek, the wavering play of her eye-lashes or the subtle pressure of her hand. And how should Youth, with his pure heart, deem evil of so fair



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

a being, or doubt that such beauty was indeed the face of Love? And as for happiness—to gaze into her strange eyes from dawn to sunset, and to lie in her glimmering arms from sunset to dawn, to feel her breath like honeyed fire through all his limbs, to listen in the darkness to the beating of her heart like a fluttering bird, to wake drenched in her sweetness, like a bee that has slumbered in the pollened deeps of a flower, to plash in the cool shallows by her side, and watch the bronzed and purple fishes gliding here and there through the lotus stems, to wander hand in hand through the sun-dappled woods, to deck her hair with wild flowers, and wreath her supple nakedness with garlands of the wandering vine—surely to deem that this was happiness was no strange thing, and to deem himself already at his journey's



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

end no surprising error in one so new to the highways of the world.

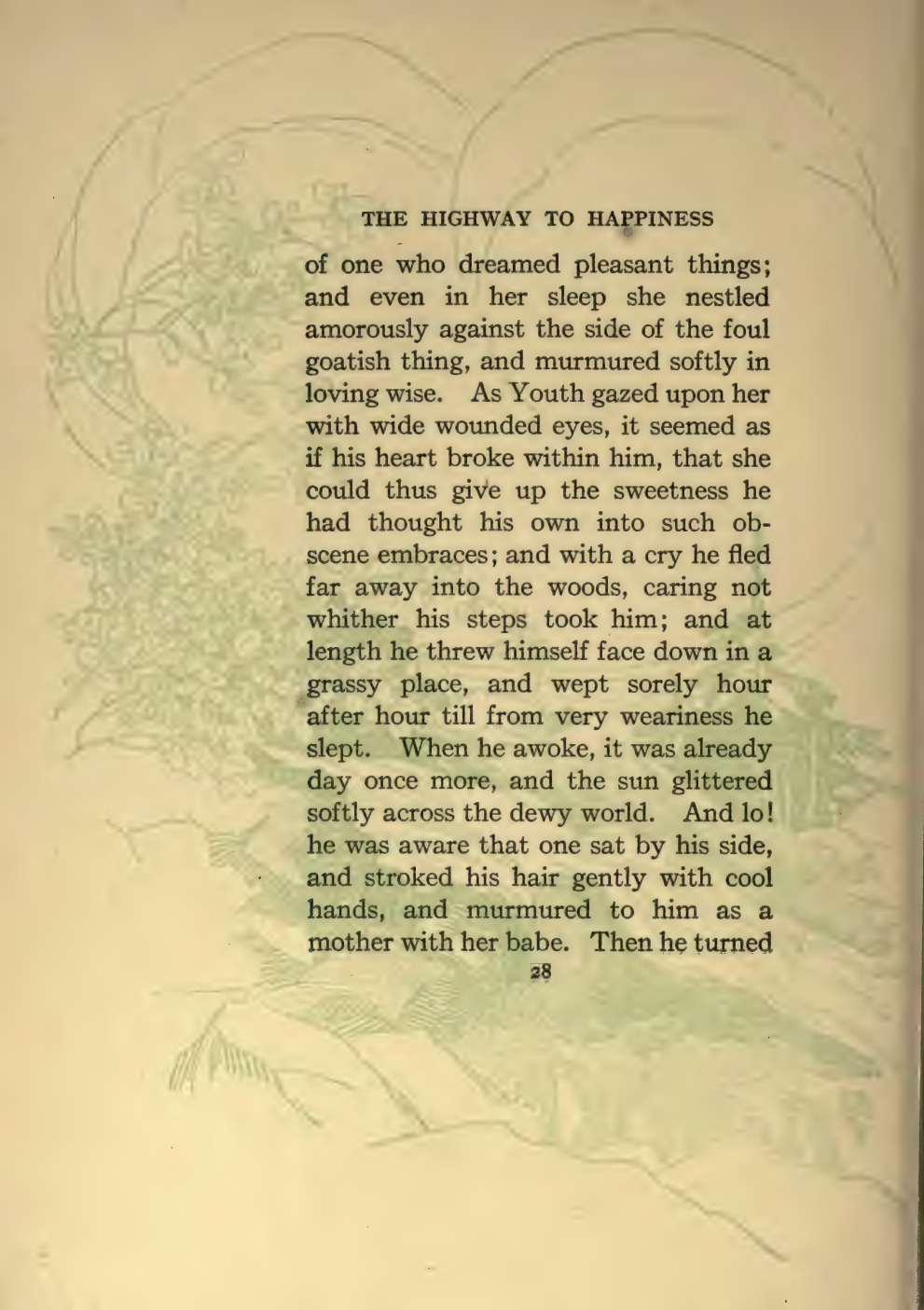
In such wise many days passed away, neither did Youth take count of them any more, nor deem that this fair life should ever come to an end. The thought of his friends came seldom to him; and, to say the truth, he missed them little, nor mourned their absence. And when at times he looked in at that white flame that was his soul, it seemed to him that it still burned brightly within his breast; for the beauty that he worshipped seemed still to him a holy thing, and the love which glowed within him for the body of the fair young witch was still a white fire.

But it befell on a day that, having slept longer than his wont, he awoke, and missed his sweet sleep-fellow from his side. He called her name, but



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

there came no answer, and he gazed this way and that about the margin of the lake, but only the blue lotuses and the white cranes were there, and there was no sound save the cooing of wood-doves hidden among the trees. And fear overcame him that some evil had befallen his love; and he went wildly hither and thither seeking her, till at length he came to an opening in the woods exceeding fresh and green, and sweet with the scent of the wild roses that grew thereabout—and there a sight met his eyes that filled his heart with loathing and sorrow. For, white as a wood-lily, she whom he loved lay asleep, twined in the embraces of a huge and hairy satyr, with the face and feet of a goat, and coarse blubbery lips brutishly thrust within the sanctuary of her tender breasts. And there was a smile on her face as she slept, as



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

of one who dreamed pleasant things; and even in her sleep she nestled amorously against the side of the foul goatish thing, and murmured softly in loving wise. As Youth gazed upon her with wide wounded eyes, it seemed as if his heart broke within him, that she could thus give up the sweetness he had thought his own into such obscene embraces; and with a cry he fled far away into the woods, caring not whither his steps took him; and at length he threw himself face down in a grassy place, and wept sorely hour after hour till from very weariness he slept. When he awoke, it was already day once more, and the sun glittered softly across the dewy world. And lo! he was aware that one sat by his side, and stroked his hair gently with cool hands, and murmured to him as a mother with her babe. Then he turned

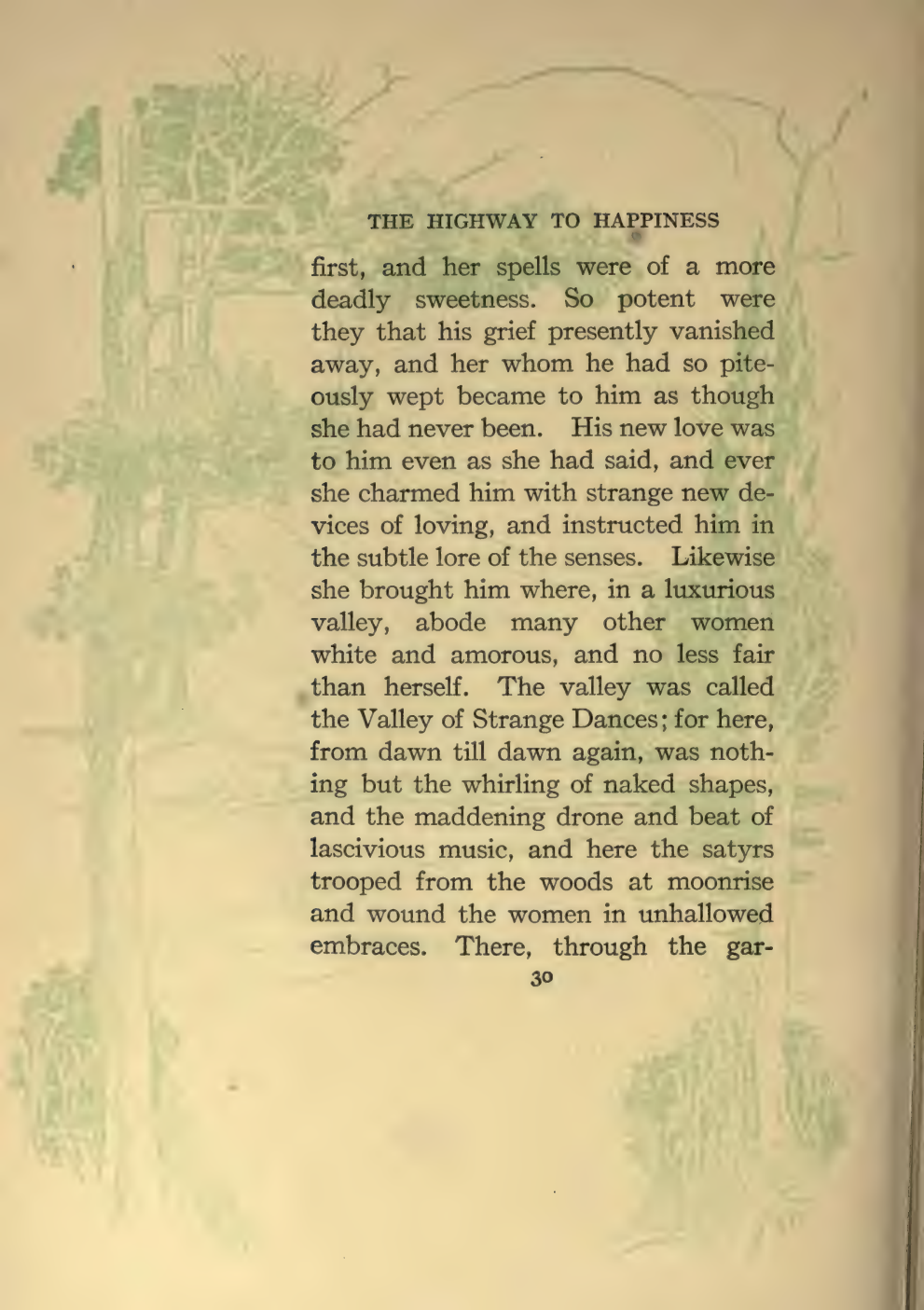
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

about with joy, dreaming it was his love, yet it was not she, but another being made of ivory and myrrh, with dark heavy locks hanging like clusters of purple grapes about her moon-white brows, and eyes of deep sea-green, glowing like soft flame far down under swaying water.

"O thou art not she!" cried Youth.

"Am I less fair and good to kiss?" asked the girl. And she drew the sad one to her, and her mouth was like a honeycomb, and the fragrance of her breasts was as a garden. And as she kissed him she murmured between her kisses, "I am the Love that brings forgetfulness of love. I know a thousand kisses, nor is one like another, and each is stranger and sweeter than the last."

Now, though the Youth knew it not, this was a witch more evil than the

A faint, green-toned illustration of a landscape, possibly a forest or a path through trees, serves as a background for the text. The style is reminiscent of a watercolor or a light ink wash.

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

first, and her spells were of a more deadly sweetness. So potent were they that his grief presently vanished away, and her whom he had so piteously wept became to him as though she had never been. His new love was to him even as she had said, and ever she charmed him with strange new devices of loving, and instructed him in the subtle lore of the senses. Likewise she brought him where, in a luxurious valley, abode many other women white and amorous, and no less fair than herself. The valley was called the Valley of Strange Dances; for here, from dawn till dawn again, was nothing but the whirling of naked shapes, and the maddening drone and beat of lascivious music, and here the satyrs trooped from the woods at moonrise and wound the women in unhallowed embraces. There, through the gar-

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

landed hours, the wine-cup passed from hand to hand, and life went by like a dizzy dream made out of flame and flowers. Here no one spake of Love, but only of Desire, and none kept faith of heart one with another, but only sought the passing honey each from each; nor recked the women in whose arms they lay, so that they were strong, nor questioned any of this face or that, so that it was fair. And Youth began to grow even as the rest, and she to seem fairest and most to be desired whom his eyes sought for the first time; nor were the satyrs abhorrent to him any more, and often as he found them whirling at his side in the moon-lit dance with their silver-bosomed partners, he smiled to think that his heart had once almost broken for such a wonted thing. For, alas, the flame of his soul was growing dark

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

within his breast, and the memory of his friends and that bright morning of his setting out fading fast away.

Yet, though they were thus out of his mind, his friends had no forgetfulness of him, but all this long time had sorrowed for him, and sought him thither and thither, night and day. And, indeed, it had seemed to him, at whiles, that he had heard their voices calling to him from the border of the woods, as he whirled in the mad dances on moonlit nights, but the wild music had drowned them; and the wine-cup and the white arms brought oblivion of them once more. Yet were there times when these evil spells would lose their power over him, and his heart be filled with sorrow and loathing and longing to be again on that bright road afoot with his four friends.

Now at length it befell that he awoke

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

one day in the dawn from a night of evil dreams, and there, standing over him, in the early light, was a tall blue-clad figure, and his heart leapt with joy, for it was his friend Faith that stood over him.

"O is it thou indeed, my friend?" he cried.

And Faith took him strongly by the hand, and kissed him on the brow and said, "Arise and let us away from this place. Well knew I that I should find thee at last."

Youth needed no second word, but was speedily up and girt for the road, and it seemed to him that a mountain of sorrow was rolled from his heart, as he strode again by the side of his friend in the pure morning air. Presently a gay green-clad figure came flying to meet them along the road.

"Did I ever doubt that we should

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

find thee again," he exclaimed, embracing him, and laughing and crying at once for joy like a child. "Said I not so, friend Faith?"

"Yea, indeed. Had it not been for this madcap Hope, our hearts had oft-times failed us."

Thereat they came where Truth awaited them at the roadside, but his greeting was graver and sadder than that of the other two, and the heart of Youth smote him sorely as he looked into his simple eyes. Nor had he courage to speak of that other friend who had gone clad in white; neither did the others speak of him, but he read in their looks and in their silence that he was dead.

Then they went along without speaking for a long space, maybe thinking of him that was dead, and Youth noted how much nobler was the beauty of

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

the road which they travelled than the softer charm of the road into which he had been ensnared, and that there was a freshness in the air that made the heart glad, and how that light of his soul in his bosom seemed renewed thereby.

Thus fared they together through the day, gravely happy in their reunion, but the blitheness of their first setting out was lost for a while, and less certain seemed they of the way, and their destination seemed afar off and doubtful of attainment. At length, as the evening drew on, they were aware, a short way off, of a pile of fair buildings against the sunset, and floating silverly across from it came the chiming of bells, sweet and pure as the evening star. It was the call to prayer from an abode of holy men that served God in those parts, and thither

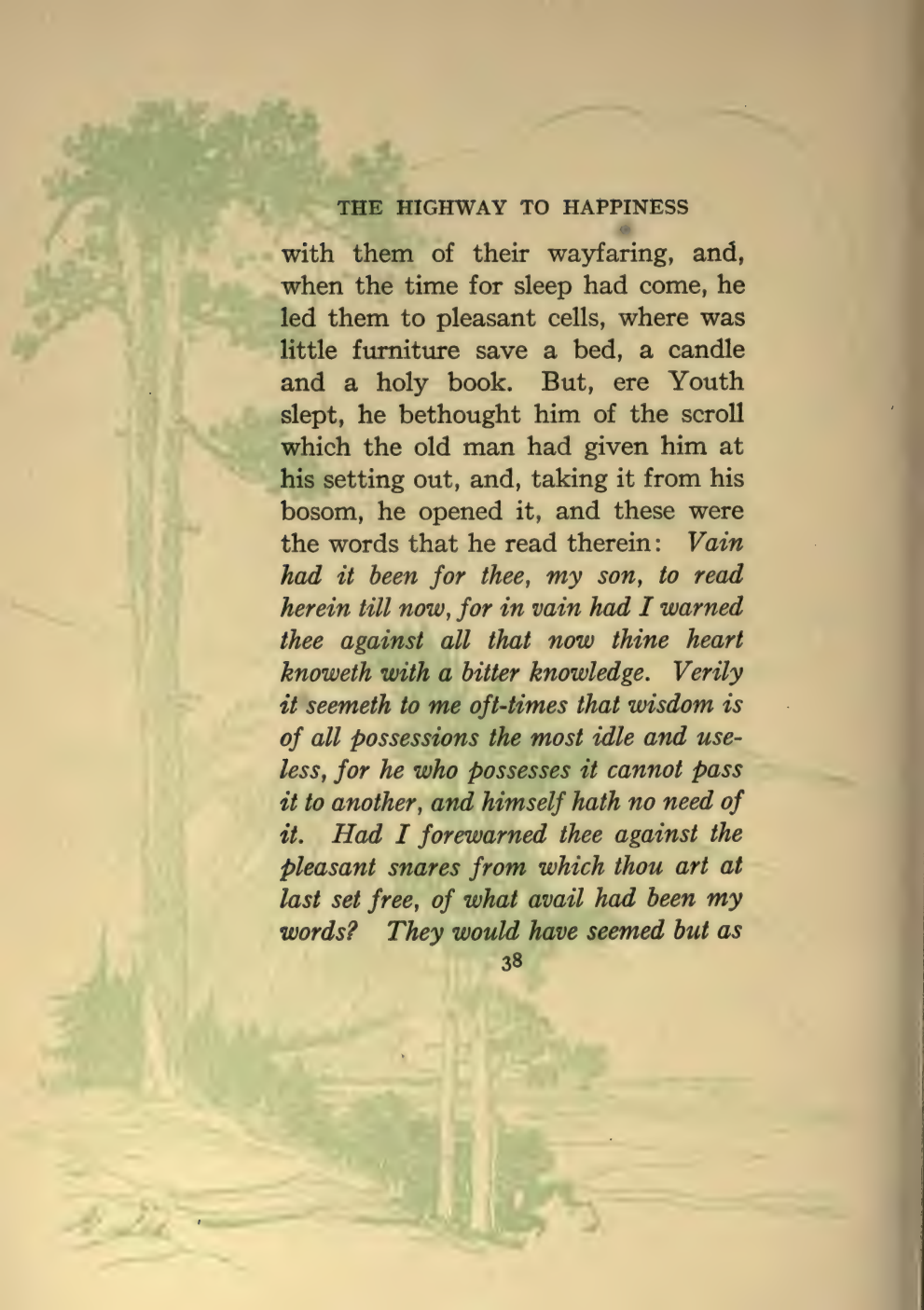


THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

Youth and his friends hastened with eager steps; for nothing had ever seemed so sweet in the ears of Youth as the chiming of the bells, and no need that he had ever known, neither for food nor for sleep, had ever seemed so sore as the need of his soul to pray. Presently they arrived at a gateway of goodly carven stone, and there one opened to them, grave but loving of countenance, and he led them across a close in the centre of which there was a garden of lilies, through still and shadowy cloisters, till at length they came to a great door opening into a vaulted chapel, where there was a radiance of many candles shining about an altar, and the fragrance of incense, and the hush and the murmur of prayer. In the dimness could be seen a company of many kneeling figures, and Youth and his friends

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

knelt with the rest, and bowed their heads and prayed. Then there swept over the heart of Youth a great sorrow and loathing for those days that he had passed in the Valley of Pleasure, and all that had seemed sweet to him seemed now exceeding bitter, and all that had seemed fair was now foul in his eyes, and he grieved for the uncleanness in which before he had rejoiced, and the tears ran through his fingers, and he groaned aloud. But Faith, that knelt by his side, pressed close to him and bade him be of good courage; and, after a little while, peace came back to his heart with the music and the holy words. When the office was ended, he who had been their guide led them to a great hall, where an evening meal of simple food was spread, and, while they refreshed themselves together, he discoursed



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

with them of their wayfaring, and, when the time for sleep had come, he led them to pleasant cells, where was little furniture save a bed, a candle and a holy book. But, ere Youth slept, he bethought him of the scroll which the old man had given him at his setting out, and, taking it from his bosom, he opened it, and these were the words that he read therein: *Vain had it been for thee, my son, to read herein till now, for in vain had I warned thee against all that now thine heart knoweth with a bitter knowledge. Verily it seemeth to me oft-times that wisdom is of all possessions the most idle and useless, for he who possesses it cannot pass it to another, and himself hath no need of it. Had I forewarned thee against the pleasant snares from which thou art at last set free, of what avail had been my words? They would have seemed but as*

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

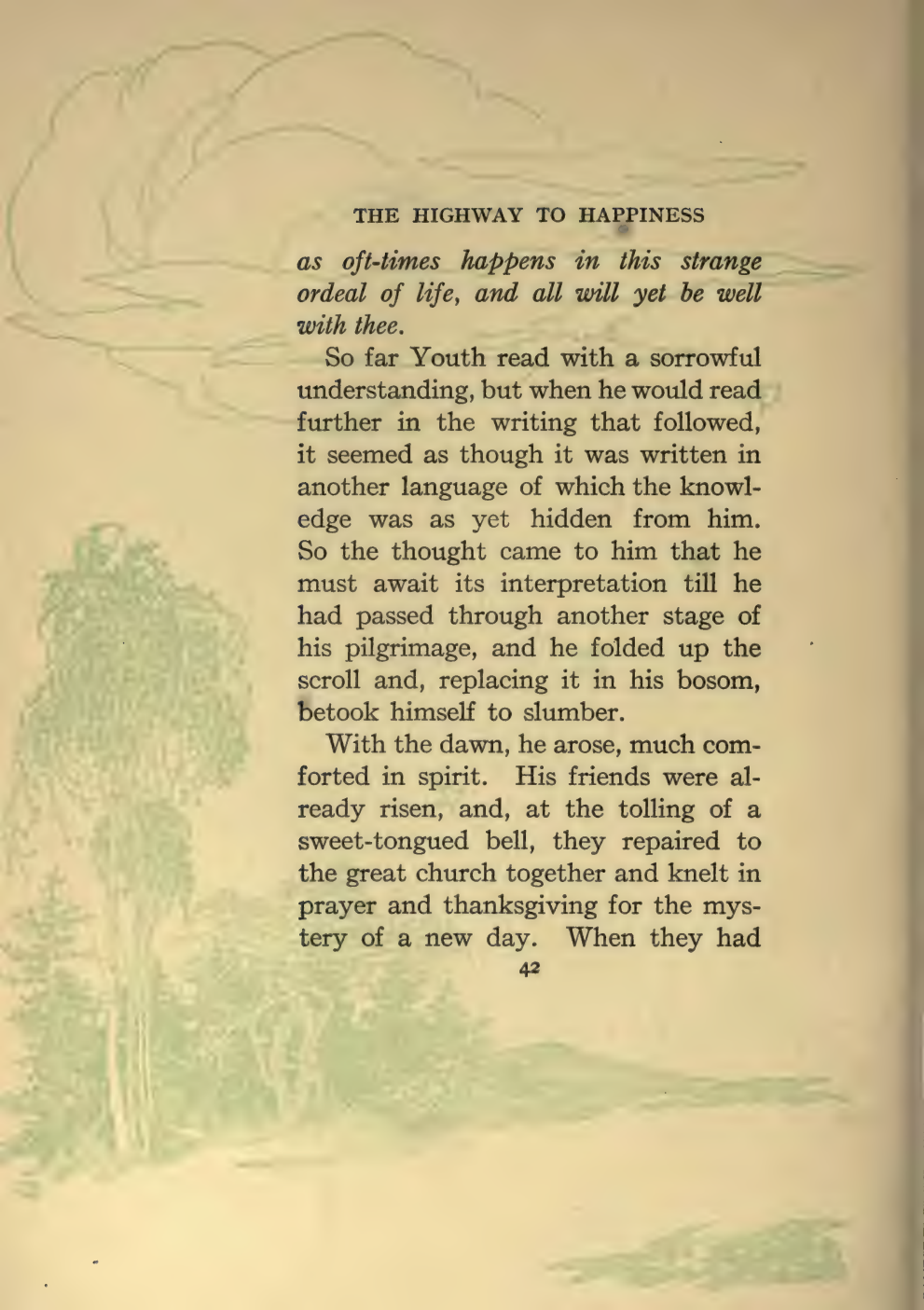
the sour speech of a dried-up ancient man, frowning upon delights no longer within his reach. Even so already is it with thyself, for the wisdom that is now thine through thine own sorrow can avail not him who comes after thee, and who is even now under the spell of those sorceries which but yesterday seemed as sweet to thee as today to him. Yet Wisdom may interpret those errors against which it may not forewarn, and so fortify the soul for future trial, bringing it a weapon, though powerless to bring it also the victory. The Ordeal of the Beauty of Woman has been thine. There are others that await thee on thy journey to Happiness, though none stranger or more dangerous. The Beauty of Woman is a great mystery. There is no symbol of eternal things so powerful to lead the soul to God, and none other so powerful also to lead the soul astray and

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

utterly destroy it. For it is with woman's body as with the holy elements of the sacrament. What should be said of a priest who misused the sacred wine for the purpose of a base drunkenness? Yet so it is with a man for whom woman is but the vessel of carnal delight, her beauty but a sensual banquet. So hath it been with thee, and, therefore, thy soul is sick and sorry. Yet had it not been so, hadst thou been true to thy first grief at finding her whom thou didst love in the arms of the satyr. For in her thou didst love Beauty with a pure heart, even though she whom thou lovest was not as she seemed in thine eyes; and in the beauty even of evil things is goodness, while we worship only the beauty and not the evil. Had thy tears remained undried, hadst thou turned away from her who brought thee the caresses of a poisonous consolation, hadst thou sought

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

then thy friends with thy whole heart, all had been well with thee, and the friend whom thou mournest had not died. Noble sorrow is one of the growing pains of the soul, and he who bears it manfully comes forth like the tempered steel. But thou alas! overcame not so, but stretched out thine hand to the anodyne of lust and numbed the divine pain in thee with base pleasures. Therefore, the innocence of thy soul has passed from thee and thy virgin bloom vanished away, as the glittering dew of morning survives not the devouring kiss of the sun. And now the sorrow from which thou wouldst escape comes back to thee two-fold, and thy heart is wrung for a sadder loss, the loss of an immortal part of thyself which else were still with thee. Yet grieve not overmuch, but hold close to the friends that remain to thee and study to make of this loss in some sort a gain,




THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

as oft-times happens in this strange ordeal of life, and all will yet be well with thee.

So far Youth read with a sorrowful understanding, but when he would read further in the writing that followed, it seemed as though it was written in another language of which the knowledge was as yet hidden from him. So the thought came to him that he must await its interpretation till he had passed through another stage of his pilgrimage, and he folded up the scroll and, replacing it in his bosom, betook himself to slumber.

With the dawn, he arose, much comforted in spirit. His friends were already risen, and, at the tolling of a sweet-tongued bell, they repaired to the great church together and knelt in prayer and thanksgiving for the mystery of a new day. When they had



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

broken their fast, a young priest of a sweet grave countenance took Youth by the arm, and led him apart into a fair garden where the green turf stretched soft and still between an avenue of ancient poplar trees making daylong a silvery murmur. Here they walked to and fro in the morning sunshine, talking sweetly of high matters of the soul; and the voice of the young priest was as balsam to the wounded spirit of Youth, and, as he listened to his words, he deemed indeed that to walk thus, discoursing of holy things, in this leafy cloister was of all happiness that nearest heaven.

"There is but one happiness that never fails us," the priest was saying, "the happiness of contemplating the holy beauty of God. To keep our eyes ever on that beauty is the divine business of us who dwell here apart



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

from a world where vain and fantastic shows obstruct the soul's vision, and steal away its strength. To him who has been suffered to behold that beauty it seems strange and not to be believed that men should busy themselves in lesser matters, and pursue ends that lead but to the dust and joys that wither even as the flowers."

As he spoke, the face of the young priest shone with an inner light, and his words sounded in the ears of Youth more like a heavenly music than mere mortal words, and Youth said:

"Let me abide here and seek the vision of which you tell, for my soul is filled with gladness only to hear the report of it."

And the priest smiled on him kindly and said:

"So be it, my son. He who seeks

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

early shall soonest find," and, as they came to the end of the grassy avenue, there stood his three friends and there was great rejoicing amongst them, when Youth told what his will was—to abide with these holy men, and seek the happiness which it seemed indeed that his soul had already found.

Thus days and months passed by and Youth scarce noted their passing, so great peace and content was his, serving the altar of God, studying to do His will and seeking ever the beauty of His face. In the books of inspired men who had come nearest to the vision he sought Him, the writings of saints and poets who before him had charted the celestial journey from earth to heaven, and wrested the holy secrets of the stars; but it was on his knees in lonely vigils where the moonlight fell through painted windows in

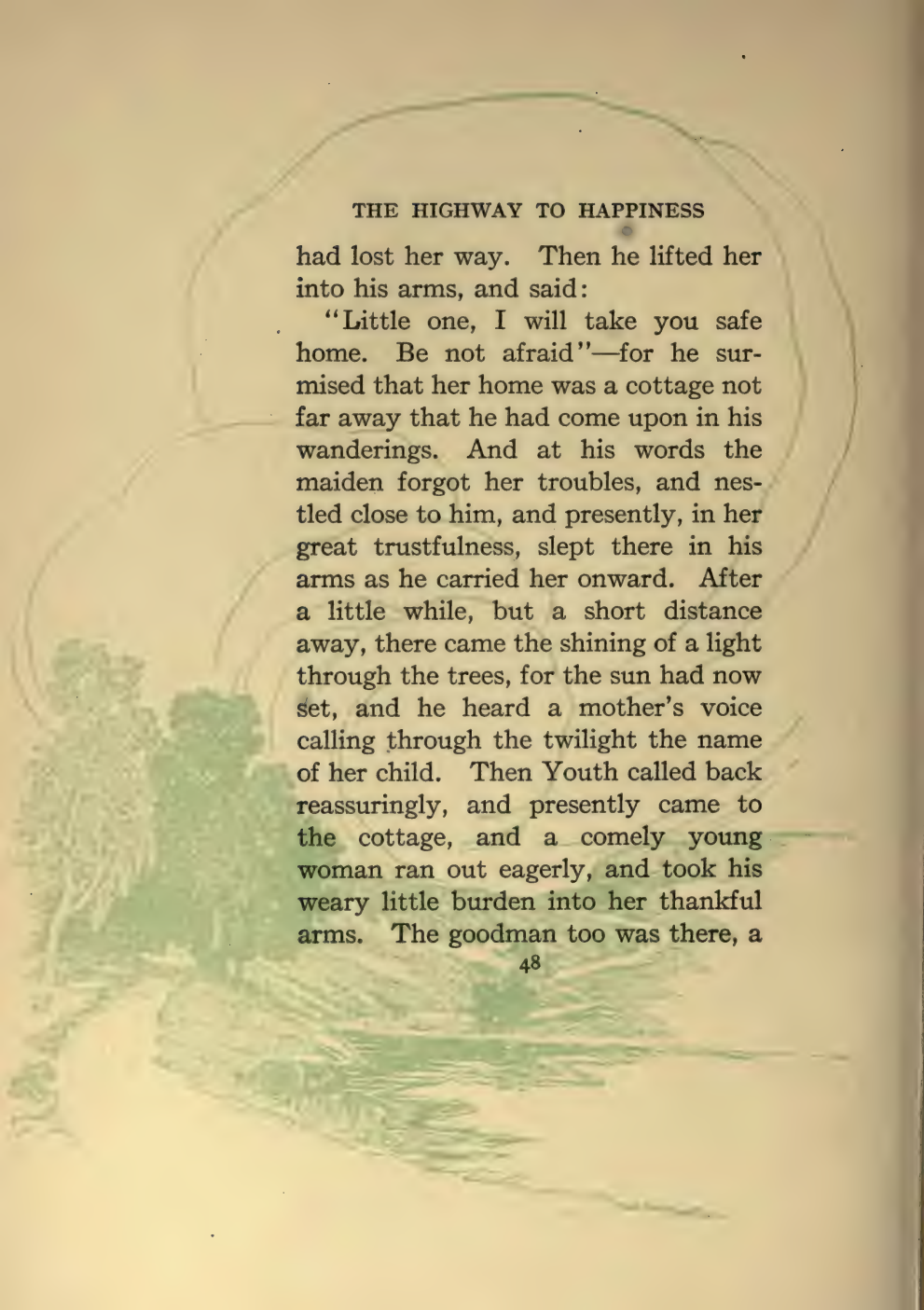


THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

the hushed and listening sanctuary that he seemed in very truth, through closed eyes, most surely to behold His brightness, and in the silence clearliest to hear His secret speech. Nor can words come near to telling the ecstasy of those hours, nor was any joy that he had ever known like to the mystic joy that then possessed him. Hours of a scarcely less noble exaltation were his, alone with the spirit of Nature in solitary wanderings among the hills and forests that surrounded the retreat of the holy men; and many a day he would sit from morn to eve high up above the world on some lofty peak, so lost in the silence of God, that it seemed as though his soul had left his body, and winged its flight into the infinite ether in a radiant freedom from fleshly trammel. Like an exulting swimmer, he seemed to throw his soul out into the

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

shining ocean of space, buoyantly upborne, and joyously swept along in the rhythms of eternity, reluctantly returning to the shores of Time and the bounds of mortal being. What Happiness was there like unto this, he asked himself one day, as about the hour of sunset he took his way homeward by a clear stream winding gently among green pastures. And, as he spoke aloud to himself, he became aware of a little maiden sitting alone amid the flowered grass. As he approached, he saw that she was weeping, and the flowers she had gathered lay scattered about her where she sat. He stroked the golden curls of the little one gently and spoke to her soothing words, and presently she looked up reassured, and told him in broken childish words that she had wandered afar from her home seeking flowers and



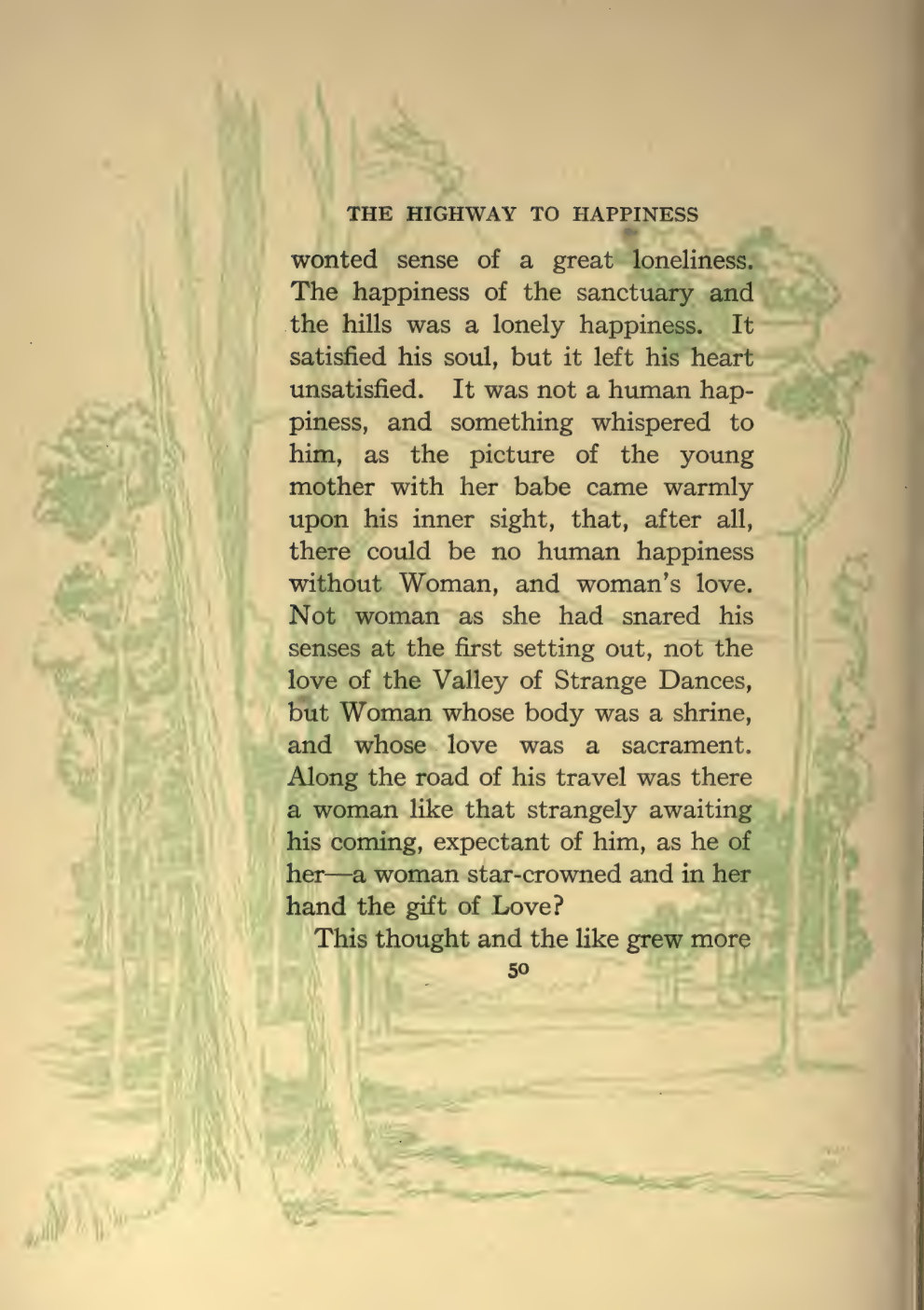
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

had lost her way. Then he lifted her into his arms, and said:

"Little one, I will take you safe home. Be not afraid"—for he surmised that her home was a cottage not far away that he had come upon in his wanderings. And at his words the maiden forgot her troubles, and nestled close to him, and presently, in her great trustfulness, slept there in his arms as he carried her onward. After a little while, but a short distance away, there came the shining of a light through the trees, for the sun had now set, and he heard a mother's voice calling through the twilight the name of her child. Then Youth called back reassuringly, and presently came to the cottage, and a comely young woman ran out eagerly, and took his weary little burden into her thankful arms. The goodman too was there, a

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

young man ruddy and laughing of face, and two other children played about his knees in the firelight. Great was their gladness to have the little one safe again, and great their thankfulness to Youth, as though forsooth he had brought them a kingdom. Nothing would suffice them but that he sat and shared their evening meal, and the fair young mother served him with great honour. The heart of Youth was strangely moved to see the happiness of these simple folk, and as he fared back to his cell under the stars, new thoughts were stirring in him, bringing him an unforeseen unrest. During the days that followed he was no longer at peace, either in the sanctuary or on the hills, but ever the picture of that simple household would come between him and his mystic meditation, and with it came an un-



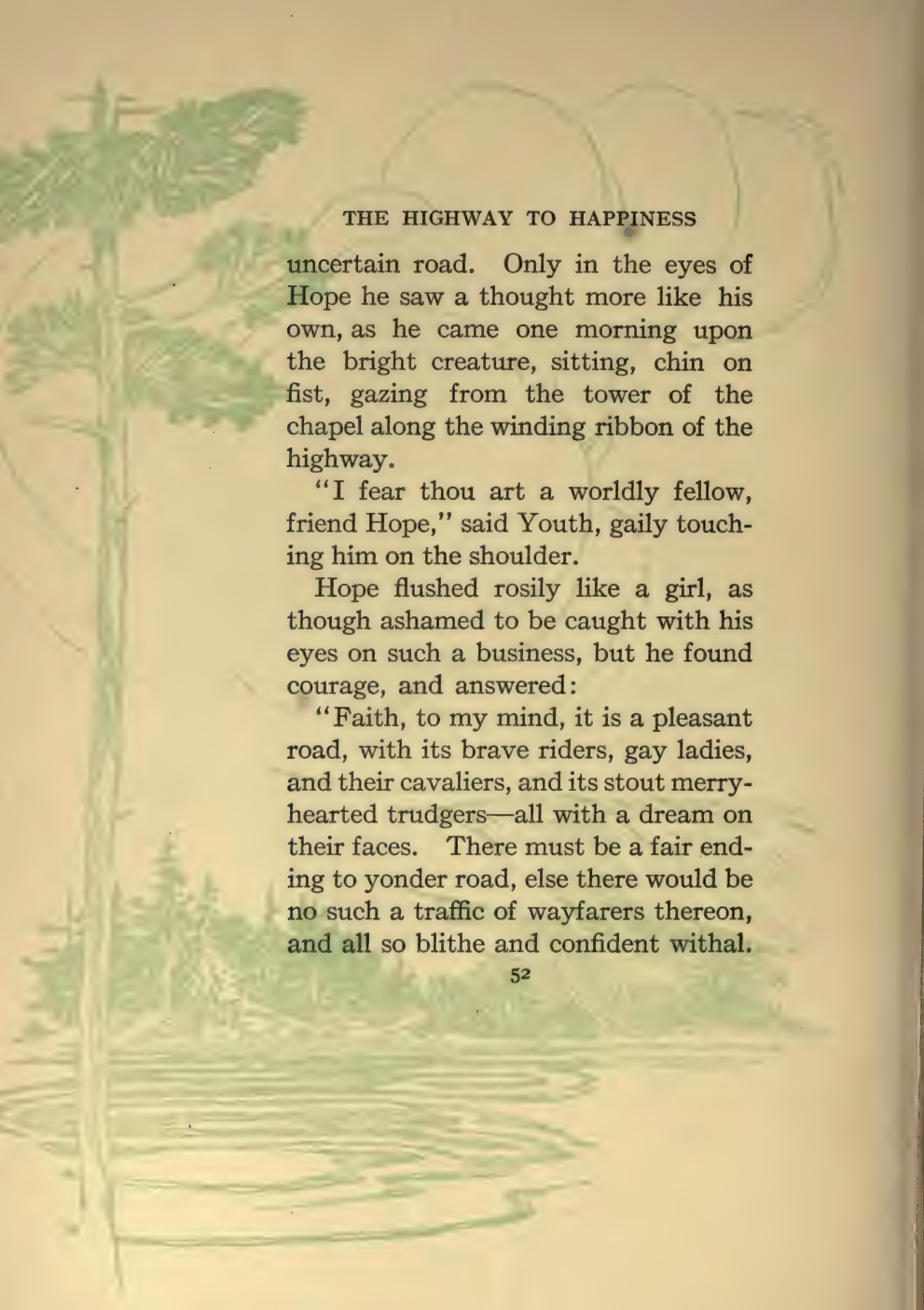
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

wonted sense of a great loneliness. The happiness of the sanctuary and the hills was a lonely happiness. It satisfied his soul, but it left his heart unsatisfied. It was not a human happiness, and something whispered to him, as the picture of the young mother with her babe came warmly upon his inner sight, that, after all, there could be no human happiness without Woman, and woman's love. Not woman as she had snared his senses at the first setting out, not the love of the Valley of Strange Dances, but Woman whose body was a shrine, and whose love was a sacrament. Along the road of his travel was there a woman like that strangely awaiting his coming, expectant of him, as he of her—a woman star-crowned and in her hand the gift of Love?

This thought and the like grew more

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

and more to keep him company, though, indeed, he strove as long as he might to pay no great heed to them, for truly his cloistered life with the holy brethren was very dear to him, and he had fear to face the road again and its perils, after the peace and security in which he had so long abode. Also, he feared lest, faring forth again, he should bring sorrow to his friends, for very pleasant to them was the life they were leading, and Faith and Truth, in especial, took great comfort of the sanctuary, and the discoursing and meditation on sacred matters. Already they had divined this new disquiet that had come to him, and their faces were shadowed because of it. Moreover, with many urgent words, and strong pleadings, they admonished and warned him of the dangers that awaited the wayfarer out there on the



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

uncertain road. Only in the eyes of Hope he saw a thought more like his own, as he came one morning upon the bright creature, sitting, chin on fist, gazing from the tower of the chapel along the winding ribbon of the highway.

"I fear thou art a worldly fellow, friend Hope," said Youth, gaily touching him on the shoulder.

Hope flushed rosily like a girl, as though ashamed to be caught with his eyes on such a business, but he found courage, and answered:

"Faith, to my mind, it is a pleasant road, with its brave riders, gay ladies, and their cavaliers, and its stout merry-hearted trudgers—all with a dream on their faces. There must be a fair ending to yonder road, else there would be no such a traffic of wayfarers thereon, and all so blithe and confident withal.

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

What lies, think you, at the end of the road?"

"Why, Happiness! thou foolish fellow," answered Youth, "hast forgotten?"

"Nay, but methought we had already attained to happiness here in this place where we abide," answered Hope, smiling slyly into Youth's face, and turning his eyes away quickly, and humming a stave to himself.

"Thou saucy Hope!" cried Youth, "tell me thy thought."

"Nay!" cried Hope, as he scampered off laughing; but as he went he called back, "Is it not even as thine own?"

Then Youth knew in his heart that, late or soon, he must once more take the road, and adventure what further there was to befall, though he held back yet for the sake of his two grave



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

friends, and because of the loving-kindness of the holy men with whom he had so long abode. That night, ere he slept, he bethought him once more of the scroll in his bosom; and, as he unfolded it, he marvelled that the writing which had before seemed meaningless to him was now become clear to his understanding.

"Again," he read, "*disquiet is come upon thee, and the lure of the highway calls thee out into the world once more, nor is thy heart any longer satisfied with the life of peace and prayer, but dreams of a Happiness of which these shall be a part but not the whole, and the worlds of heaven and earth meet in a woman's love and a child's prattle. So is it with all men that would live the full life of a man, yet is the dream not easy to come by, or, when come by, easy to hold. For either the man falls short, or the*

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

woman falls short, and less hard is it, my son, to live alone with God, as a priest, or alone with Nature, as a poet, than alone with a woman, as a man. For with her thou must be all three, and she to thee must be as God and as Nature and as woman too. But the dream is fair, and all other happiness is but a segment of happiness whereof this is the perfect circle. The life of the senses, which, to thy sorrow, thou hast known, is one segment, the life of the spirit, which, to thy joy thou hast also known, is another segment—but the perfect circle—how shall a man describe it? Yet be sure it awaits thee, travel but with prudence, there at the ending of the road."

Once more the writing grew hard to decipher, and Youth returned the scroll to his bosom, and turned to slumber; but, on the morrow noon, he

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

arose and girt himself to journey once more. Great was the sorrow of the holy men that he should depart, and, in particular the young priest whom he most loved strove to turn aside his resolution and keep him still amongst them. And, had it not been for the look in the eyes of Hope, very like he had desisted, for Faith and Truth were fain to remain where they were, from fear of the perils of the road. Yet, remembering their vow of brotherhood, as well as from the affection they bore him, they would not suffer him to face the journey alone. So presently all four were together once more on the highway, and Youth and Hope were glad of it, though Youth saw the towers of Peace and Prayer fade behind them not without tears, and a misgiving that he might never see them again. Then Hope set up a carol, and the



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

breeze blew freshly out of the adventurous distance, so that his heart rose once more with the thought of the new things that were to do, and all that might befall.

Yet they had not come far upon their way, when they chanced upon a strange encounter which a while damped their spirits, and even made Hope less blithe of cheer. Being mid-day, they had sought a wayside inn whereat to refresh themselves, and, as they entered the inn-parlour, they were aware of a traveller sitting at one of the tables, who gave them a gloomy good-day. He was a tall soldierly man of middle age, still handsome of feature, but seamed and scarred as with old battles, and his once fine clothes and his long sword had alike a rusty look, while his great weather-worn hat would have been all the better for a



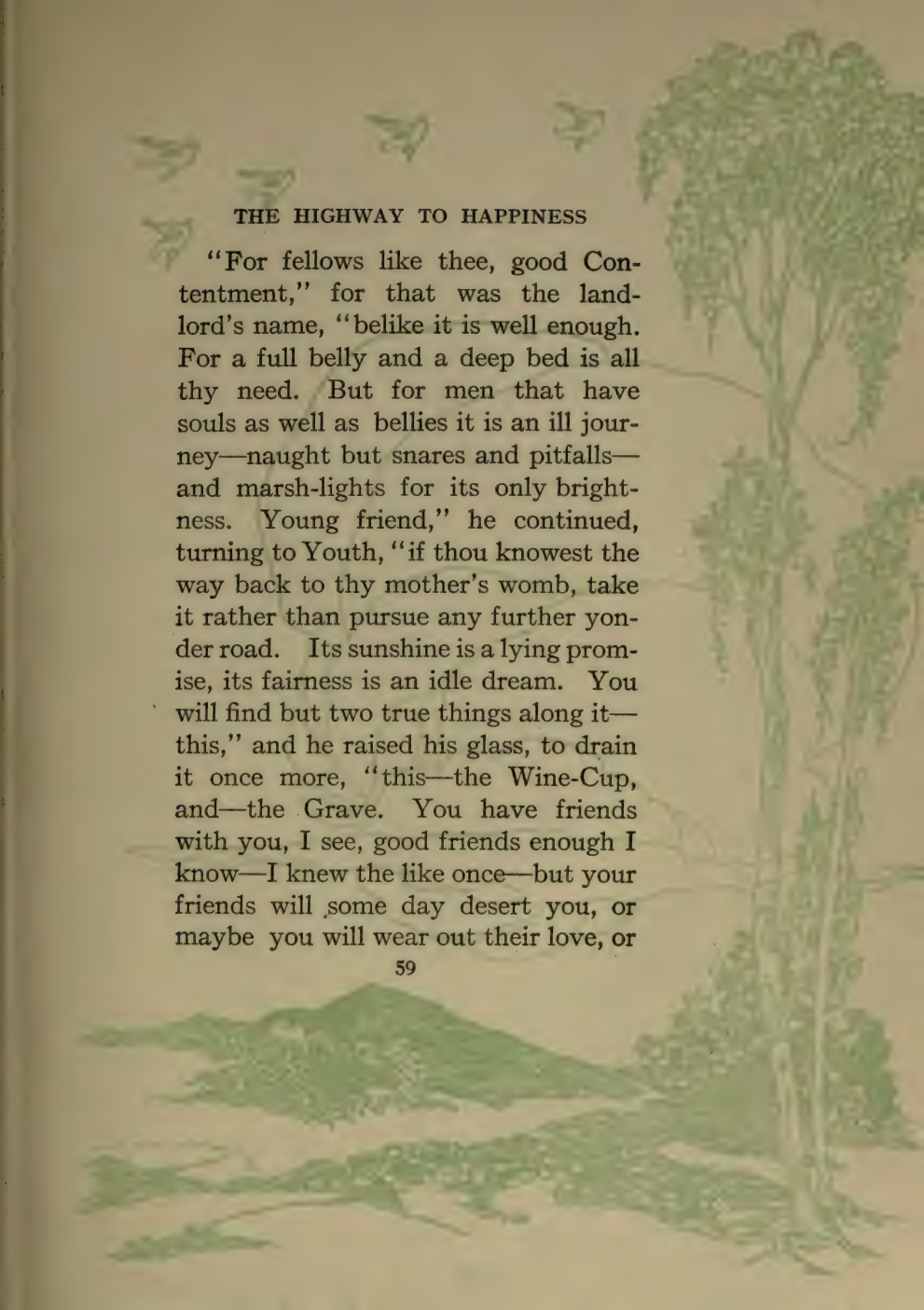
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

new feather. He sat as one immersed in gloomy thoughts, and before him stood a flagon of wine all but empty. He poured the remainder of it into his glass, as Youth and his friends seated themselves, drank it at one gloomy draught, and loudly called the landlord to bring another. The landlord, a rosy well-fed fellow, brought it with bustling complaisance, and when he had filled his glass, the traveller held it up to the light, saying, as he did so:

"This is all we find along the road, landlord—all we find—the one thing that does not fail us—the one truth in a world of lies."

And he gulped down the wine, and refilled his glass.

"Say not so," said the landlord, "nor damp the spirits of these young travellers. It is a good road for those who travel it aright."



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

"For fellows like thee, good Contentment," for that was the landlord's name, "belike it is well enough. For a full belly and a deep bed is all thy need. But for men that have souls as well as bellies it is an ill journey—naught but snares and pitfalls—and marsh-lights for its only brightness. Young friend," he continued, turning to Youth, "if thou knowest the way back to thy mother's womb, take it rather than pursue any further yonder road. Its sunshine is a lying promise, its fairness is an idle dream. You will find but two true things along it—this," and he raised his glass, to drain it once more, "this—the Wine-Cup, and—the Grave. You have friends with you, I see, good friends enough I know—I knew the like once—but your friends will some day desert you, or maybe you will wear out their love, or



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

they will die; but I have two friends that will never forsake me—they are all I have found on the journey. I drink to them—the Wine-Cup and the Grave”—and he drained his glass once more.

“Nay, nay,” said the landlord, “thou didst not always sing to this tune. I have seen thee merry enough.”

“Yea! and merry were I still, had I been as thou—an eyeless belly of a man. But I have seen the darkness that hides within the brightness, I have heard the tears that fall all day in the sunshine. I have stretched out my hand to a dream and gathered a handful of dust. I have loved faces fair as the rainbow, and lo! they were but ashes and worms. . . .”

And much more spake the stranger in such wise, but presently he grew weary with much speaking and heavy

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

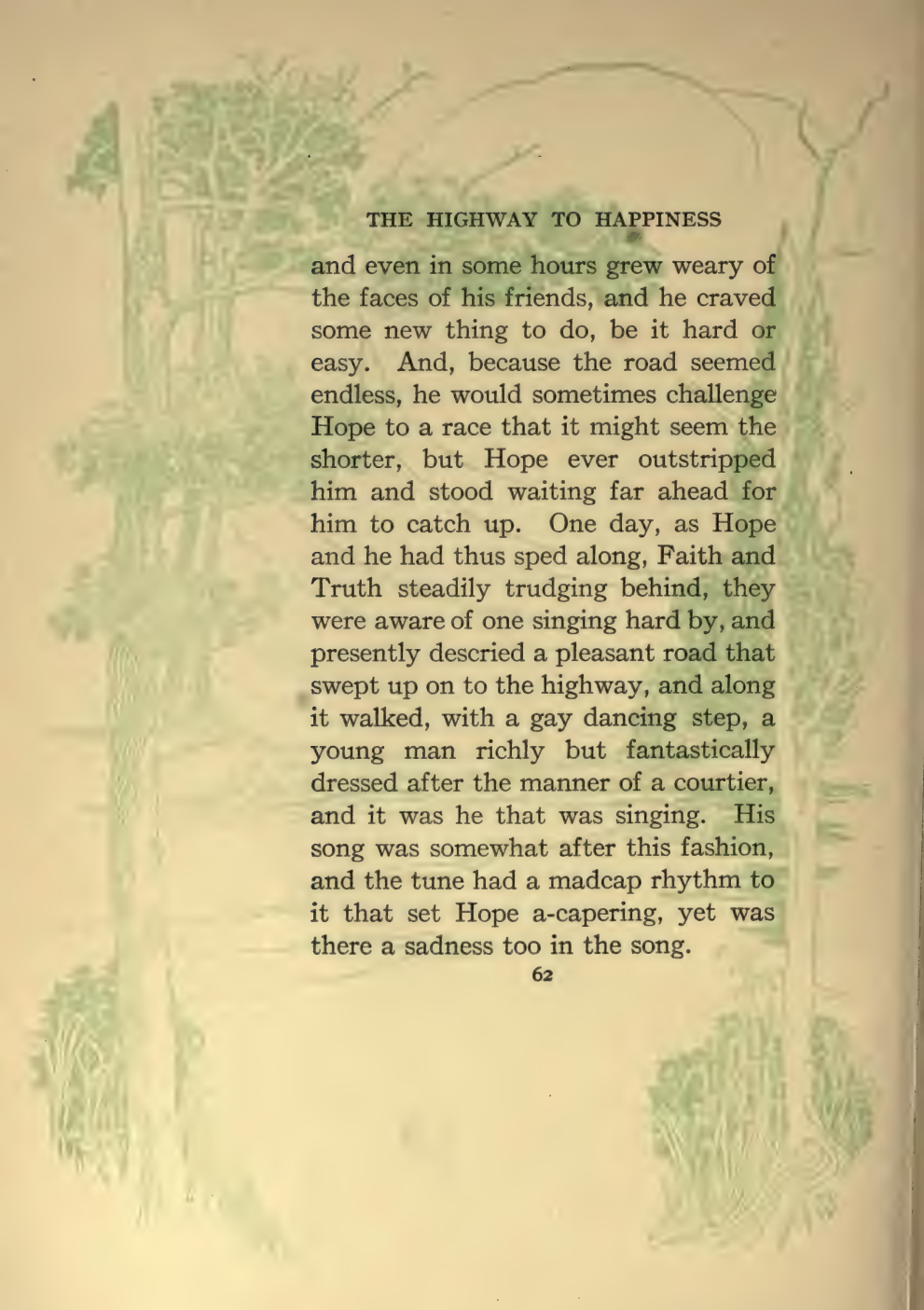
with the wine, and he laid his head down between his hands on the wine-stained table and slept.

"Heed him not," said the landlord, as he busied himself, serving Youth and his friends with dishes, which they ate with but a sorry appetite, so heavily hung the stranger's talk upon their spirits. "He is a sorrowful man, and his talk is not for young ears."

"What name hath he?" asked Youth.

"His name is Disillusion," answered Contentment.

After this encounter, nothing worthy the recording happened for many days. Only the friends travelled on tranquilly together through a pleasant level land of meadows and streams, glad enough thereof; yet, for all its pleasantness, Youth would at whiles weary of the sameness of the days,



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

and even in some hours grew weary of the faces of his friends, and he craved some new thing to do, be it hard or easy. And, because the road seemed endless, he would sometimes challenge Hope to a race that it might seem the shorter, but Hope ever outstripped him and stood waiting far ahead for him to catch up. One day, as Hope and he had thus sped along, Faith and Truth steadily trudging behind, they were aware of one singing hard by, and presently descried a pleasant road that swept up on to the highway, and along it walked, with a gay dancing step, a young man richly but fantastically dressed after the manner of a courtier, and it was he that was singing. His song was somewhat after this fashion, and the tune had a madcap rhythm to it that set Hope a-capering, yet was there a sadness too in the song.

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

Half fun and half sorrow
Is La Folie,
There is no to-morrow
With La Folie;
And 'tis laugh while you may,
And weep when you must,
For we've only to-day,
And to-morrow we're dust—
Says La Folie.

Half good and half evil
Is La Folie,
Beware of the devil
In La Folie;
'Tis be good when you must,
And laugh all you can,
And put not your trust
In your enemy man—
Says La Folie.

Half tears and half laughter
Is La Folie,

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

O what comes after
For La Folie!
And 'tis give him your heart
Like a woman true,
And watch him break it
In half for you—
Says La Folie.

By the time the song had ended, the singer came up to where Youth and Hope awaited him, and gave them a laughing, but courtly good-day.

"On my faith, it is good to see your new faces, gentlemen," said he. "I am weary of the same well-conned countenances, these many days. And whither, if I may make bold to ask it, is your journeying?"

"We journey in search of Happiness," answered Youth simply. "Mayhap you can instruct us in the way."

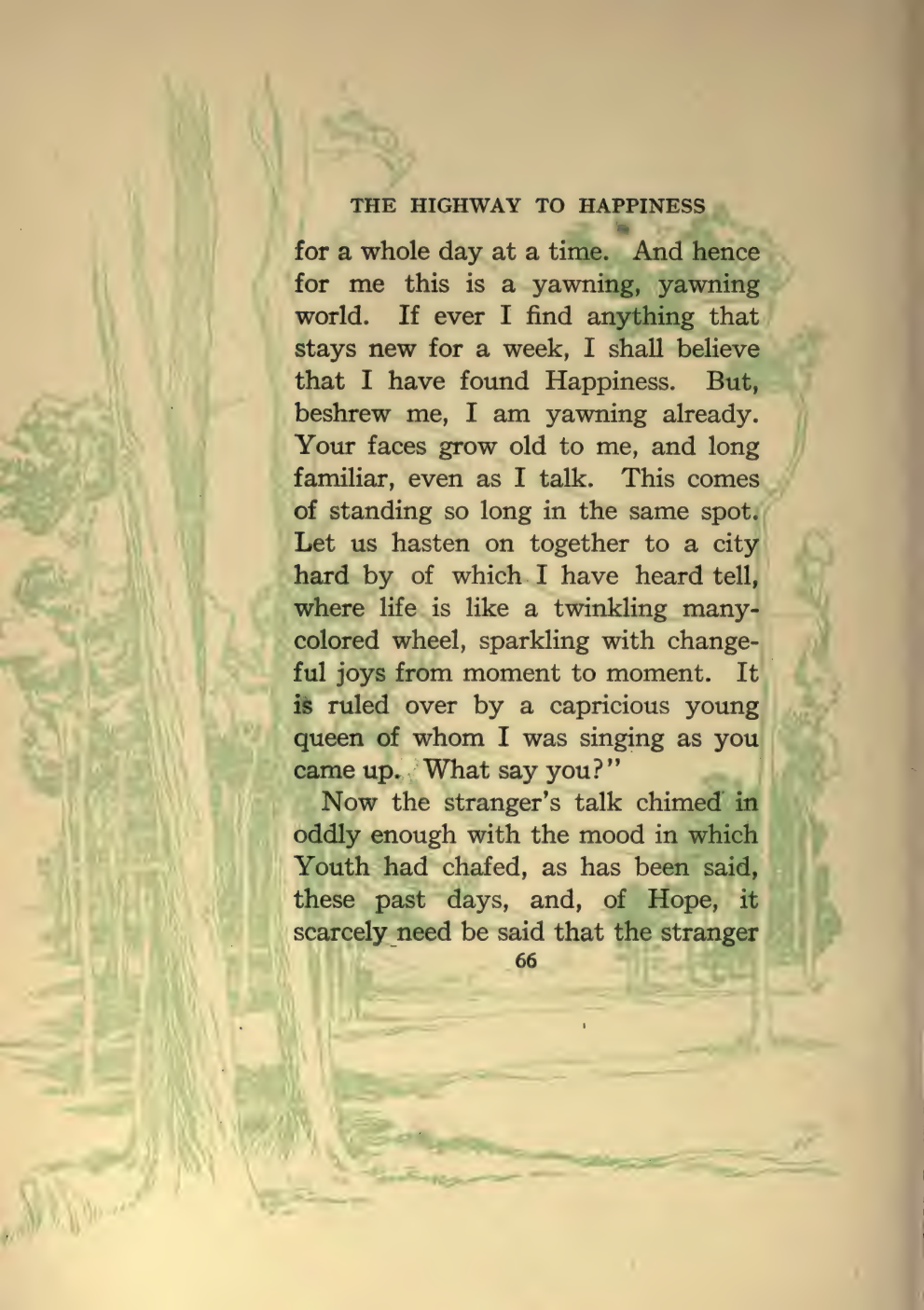
"Methinks that is the quest of all

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

men," laughed the stranger, "but, though I have met many who sought it, all seemed to be taking a different road, and some who stay at home, and never seek at all, claim that it is theirs. But that not I, marry; for it is my notion that Happiness is no stay-at-home, but is ever flitting from place to place, now here, now there, and the very soul of her is change. But I was born under a dancing star, and must be ever on the move."

"We are Youth and Hope," said Youth, taken with the open style of this new acquaintance.

"And I am Novelty, at your service," responded the other. "I journey in search of whatsoever is new and strange, wherever it may be found; and when I have found it I stay with it—well, as long as a butterfly stays with a flower. Alas! nothing is new



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

for a whole day at a time. And hence for me this is a yawning, yawning world. If ever I find anything that stays new for a week, I shall believe that I have found Happiness. But, beshrew me, I am yawning already. Your faces grow old to me, and long familiar, even as I talk. This comes of standing so long in the same spot. Let us hasten on together to a city hard by of which I have heard tell, where life is like a twinkling many-colored wheel, sparkling with change-ful joys from moment to moment. It is ruled over by a capricious young queen of whom I was singing as you came up. What say you?"

Now the stranger's talk chimed in oddly enough with the mood in which Youth had chafed, as has been said, these past days, and, of Hope, it scarcely need be said that the stranger

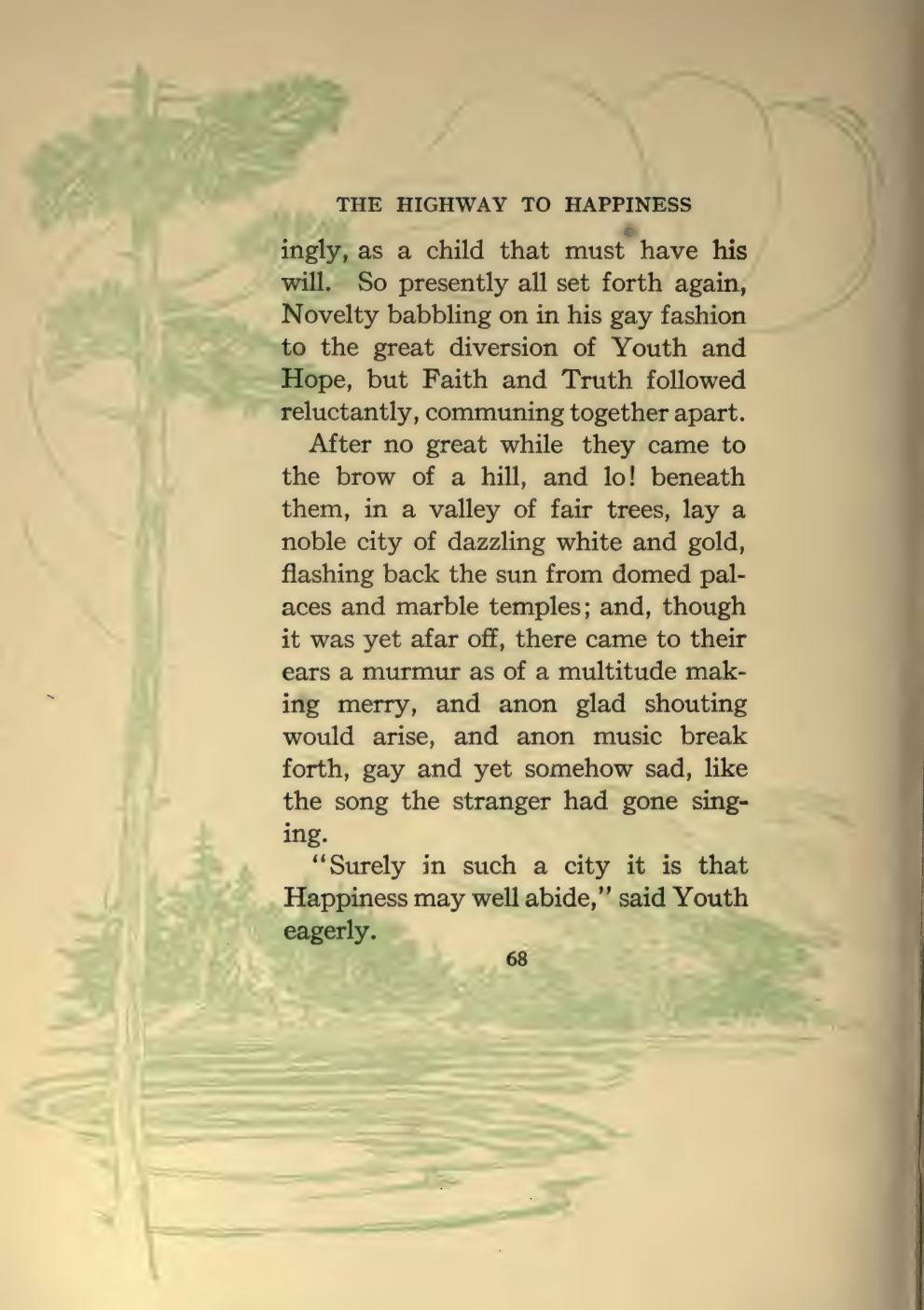
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

spoke his very thought. But Faith and Truth, who had come up while Novelty was a-prattle, regarded him askance, and scarce heeded his greeting, sternly frowning on his words. Perceiving this, the stranger made merry with their sober mien, and homely antique garb, and Youth himself grew impatient with their sad looks.

"Must ever be at prayers, and never at play, good friends?" said he. "Do as thou wilt, but I am weary of the unchanging way, and would make trial of the wonders whereof this stranger tells."

"So be it," answered Faith and Truth sorrowfully. "Our hearts mis-give us for this fancy of thine, but thou knowest we are ever thy friends."

Then Youth repented of his hasty words, and smiled on them appeal-



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

ingly, as a child that must have his will. So presently all set forth again, Novelty babbling on in his gay fashion to the great diversion of Youth and Hope, but Faith and Truth followed reluctantly, communing together apart.

After no great while they came to the brow of a hill, and lo! beneath them, in a valley of fair trees, lay a noble city of dazzling white and gold, flashing back the sun from domed palaces and marble temples; and, though it was yet afar off, there came to their ears a murmur as of a multitude making merry, and anon glad shouting would arise, and anon music break forth, gay and yet somehow sad, like the song the stranger had gone singing.

"Surely in such a city it is that Happiness may well abide," said Youth eagerly.

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

"At all events," said Novelty, "there be new faces and new fashions—for a little while."

Then they pressed on, and were soon at the gate of the city, where a band of merry-makers met them, some with viols in their hands, and some scattering flowers, and some dancing towards them in pairs, and they thronged about the newcomers with cries of welcome, and led them up into the city, which was decked with tapestries and hung with boughs as for a festival.

"It is the birthday of our queen," said one.

"What name hath she?" asked Youth.

"Folly is her name," answered another, "and she hath a birthday every day, for every day she is born again. She changeth ever, yet is ever the same."



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

The streets were alive with surging crowds good-humouredly jostling each other, and pouring from all sides in the direction of a marble building rising from the centre of a vast square which stretched about it in innumerable sweeping steps of approach. The building was like a temple in form, a thousand columns surrounding it with spacious colonnades, and high over all a golden dome soaring to the clouds. From within came the sound of music and laughter, and sweet odours streamed out of the great portals, as though the interior was filled with roses. At length Youth and his friends found themselves carried on the living stream till they were within the vast hall, and lo! the great dome that without was glittering gold was seen on its inner side to be an immense azure shell pierced with mimic stars.

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

Here daylight entered never. The simple sun sufficed not the fantastic folk that thronged this presence-chamber of Queen Folly, nor the vault of heaven with its steadfast stars. Better pleased were they with a mock firmament, from which shone many-coloured lights, dazzling and delirious, and making a very motley of the air. The walls and the pillars of the chamber were of a strange blue marble, the mysterious blue of the sea, and midmost of all, as though hovering between earth and sky, hung throned the figure of the queen, robed in the semblance of a snow-white butterfly, great moonlit wings springing from her shoulders and waving to and fro in the perfumed air, while her feet were poised upon an immense golden flower which was her throne.

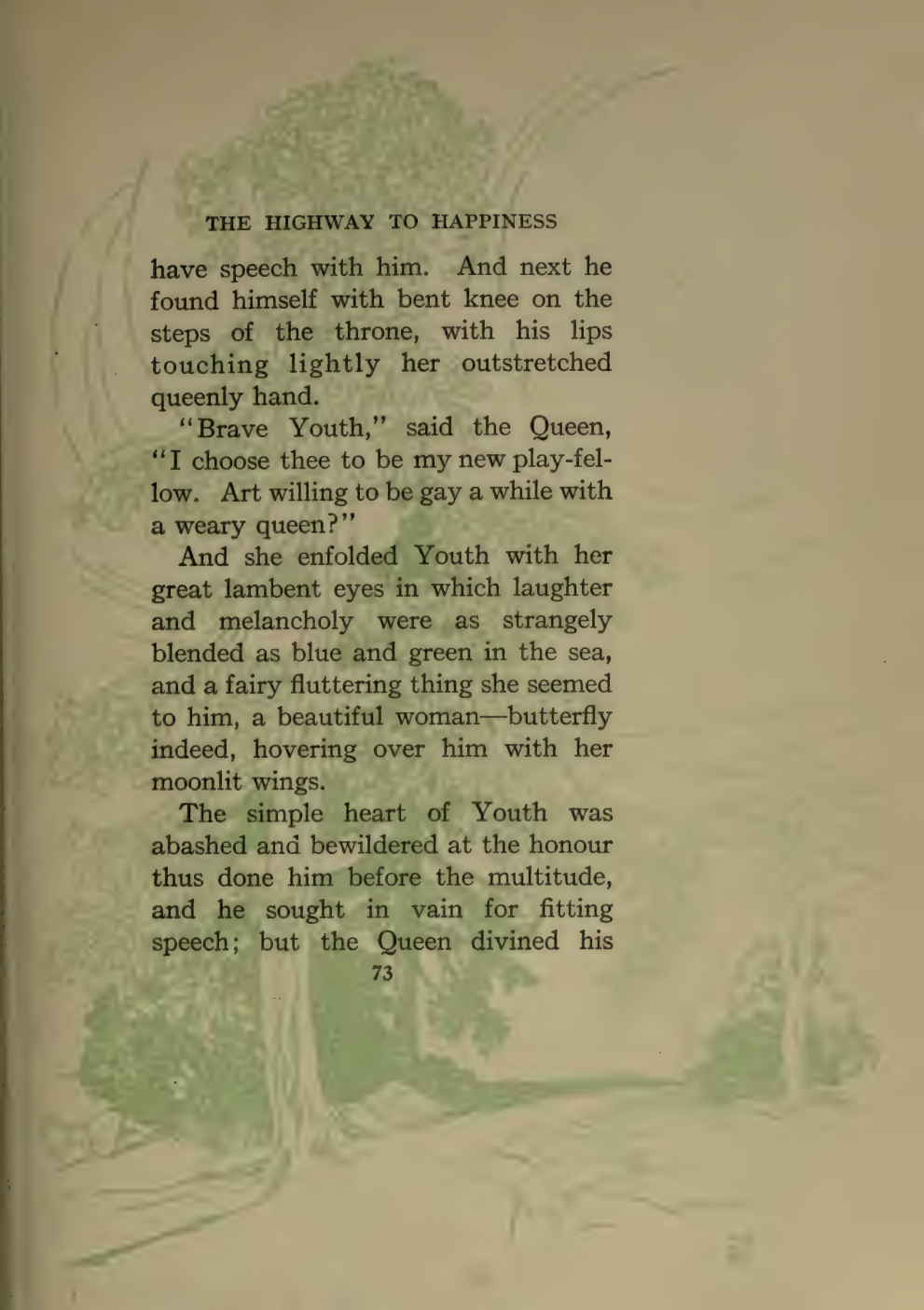
"So Folly," whispered Novelty into

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

the ear of Youth, as they stood together in the press, "hovers like a butterfly over the world, forever curious, forever dissatisfied, forever gay. 'Tis an ingenious conceit, very cunningly played."

"She has a sad heart," answered Youth. "I can see it in her beautiful eyes."

"Beware the sadness in the eyes of Folly," rejoined the courtier; but Youth scarce heard him, for, being tall of stature and very goodly to look on, his brave head had caught the gaze of the Queen, and she smiled at him sweetly across the throng, so that all other knowledge faded from him save the sweetness of her smile and the sadness of her eyes. But he noted that she spake to one at her side, who presently sought Youth through the press, saying that the queen would



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

have speech with him. And next he found himself with bent knee on the steps of the throne, with his lips touching lightly her outstretched queenly hand.

"Brave Youth," said the Queen, "I choose thee to be my new play-fellow. Art willing to be gay a while with a weary queen?"

And she enfolded Youth with her great lambent eyes in which laughter and melancholy were as strangely blended as blue and green in the sea, and a fairy fluttering thing she seemed to him, a beautiful woman—butterfly indeed, hovering over him with her moonlit wings.

The simple heart of Youth was abashed and bewildered at the honour thus done him before the multitude, and he sought in vain for fitting speech; but the Queen divined his



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

trouble, and smiled kindly on him once more—

“Vex not thy tongue for speech,” said she, “that blush upon thy cheek is a finer compliment than my courtiers have known to pay me this many a day.” And she sighed and grew wistful, as one who recalled a lost innocence, and Youth loved her and vowed himself the servant of the changeful mystery of her eyes.

“But thy garb is all too sober for this happy day,” said she, turning to laughter once more, “my chamberlain shall lead thee to the palace that from today is thine, and there thou shalt robe thyself in fitting raiment, and come again unto me that we may feast together and make merry.”

Thereat an aged courtier, whose name was Ceremony, clad in a purple robe with a tippet of ermine, and car-

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

rying an ivory wand in his hand, very stiff and pedantic in manner, led Youth away through the throng, and presently brought him to a noble house set in a garden fantastically devised with quaintly shaped flower beds, and trees artfully trimmed into the forms of birds and beasts, with fountains and statues placed here and there, and all about the house a grove of myrtles murmuring musically. Within the aged chamberlain left him to the care of a conceited dancing fellow, pranked out in gaudy fanciful attire, whose name was Fashion, and this one led Youth into a room of many mirrors, and cupboards in which hung divers raiment, and serving-men stood about ready to do the bidding of him who was called Fashion. But first two of them led Youth to a bath wrought of mother-of-pearl, and, divesting him of



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

his way-worn garments, bathed him in perfumed water, and having dried him with soft towels of purple wool, anointed him with sweet-smelling essences, and led him back once more to the mirrored room, where Fashion awaited him, with obsequious mien and honeyed compliment.

"There be," said he, "in these cupboards raiment appropriate for each day in the year; for, as the earth arrays itself newly each morn, bringing forth new flowers for its adornment day by day, so it beseems man to learn the lesson of its exquisite variety, and most of all he who would please the fancy of our rainbow-minded Queen, for whom change is the delicate music that plays through all things. It is for him who would win her love to divine her mood each day, and dexterously to mirror it,

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

not least in his garments, for which indeed the Queen hath greater concern than for aught else. Yea! it were a capital offence in her eyes to come twice into her presence in the same garb, or to wear April fashions in May. . ."

And so he prattled on, Youth, meanwhile, in the simplicity of his heart, choosing at hazard a costume that seemed at once gay and wistful, like the Queen's eyes. When, with the help of one and another, Youth was at length apparelled to the great content of the jackanapes Fashion, one whose name was Vanity brought him a mirror and bade him look therein, and indeed his own eyes told him that he was a pretty fellow enough in his fine new gauds. Then came one and announced that his chariot awaited him, and, descending a broad staircase, Youth

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

beheld a dainty coach of gilt and crystal drawn by six milk-white horses, and in this he was presently driven to the Queen's palace—nor was it to be wondered at that his young heart was light within him to think of all this delicate magnificence that had thus befallen him through the fairy favour of the Queen. Yet, as he stepped out of the chariot, and made his way up the stairway of the palace, his eyes saddened, for there in the throng stood his three friends. Faith and Truth sent after him a long gaze full of love and sorrow, but Hope was laughing as ever, and blew him a kiss over the crowd.

The Queen awaited him in a robe that seemed fashioned of woven moonlight, and she smiled as well pleased with him in his new guise, and they passed in together to a great hall

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

where were laid tables glittering with all the furniture of luxurious feasting, gold and silver and crystal, and at one end of the high table was a raised dais draped in cloth of gold with two seats of ivory. On one of these the Queen seated herself, and bade Youth seat himself in the other at her side, and then, with a great rustle of silken garments and flashing of jewels, all the courtiers, resplendent gallants, and starry swan-white ladies seated themselves also, and the feast began. For a while Youth was bewildered with the dazzle and musical din of it all, for the like of such luxury his eyes had never yet beheld or his simple mind conceived. But the Queen watched his wonder with kind eyes, as though he had been a child, and encouraged him with gentle smiles and gracious words, feigning a heart as

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

simple as his own; till at length he grew more at home amid the unwonted grandeur, and his tongue was loosed and he found courage to make tender speech to the Queen of her loveliness, and to say out his thoughts of this and that. Much indeed he marvelled at the fantastic fashions of his fellow guests, each of whom seemed to rival his neighbour in singularity and extravagance of dress and manner, so that to his honest thought it seemed as though he had strayed into a company of mad folk, so bedizened and coxcombical were they all. And the manner of the many and strange dishes seemed no less a fashion of madness to him who had been wonted to simple fare and drink of the crystal well; for here were birds from distant lands the like of which he had never seen, served with all their tropic plumage still upon

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

them, and monstrous fishes covered with gilding, with jewels for their eyes, and pastry built up in the semblance of towers and pinnacles, and confections of carved sugar of divers shapes of animals and mythological beings, dragons, mermaids, and the like. And of certain tiny eggs it was told that men each day lost their lives falling from inaccessible crags seeking to gather them for the Queen's table; and each day men were drowned in the sea diving into hidden depths for the rare sea-snail, which, for all their labour, the weary Queen left untouched on her golden plate. Such was The Folly of Strange Dishes, which was but one of the myriad fancies with which the Queen strove to appease the fever of her restless mind. As with the food, so was it with the wines of every hue and fragrance which circulated in ves-

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

sels of every fantastic shape and fairest workmanship. The Queen's own cup was the exquisite masterpiece of a great artist who had broken his heart in making it beautiful, and the wine she seldom brushed with her lips was of a mysterious vintage sacred to herself, the grapes of which, it was whispered, were fed upon the broken bodies of slaves.

Amid all the various feasters there were two or three who in especial caught the eye of Youth and awakened his curiosity. One was a keen-eyed glittering fellow who was forever talking, and setting those about him in a roar from moment to moment; yet when it chanced that Youth was able to catch his words, they seemed strangely without sense, and he marvelled why his companions were moved to laughter thereby. So he asked his

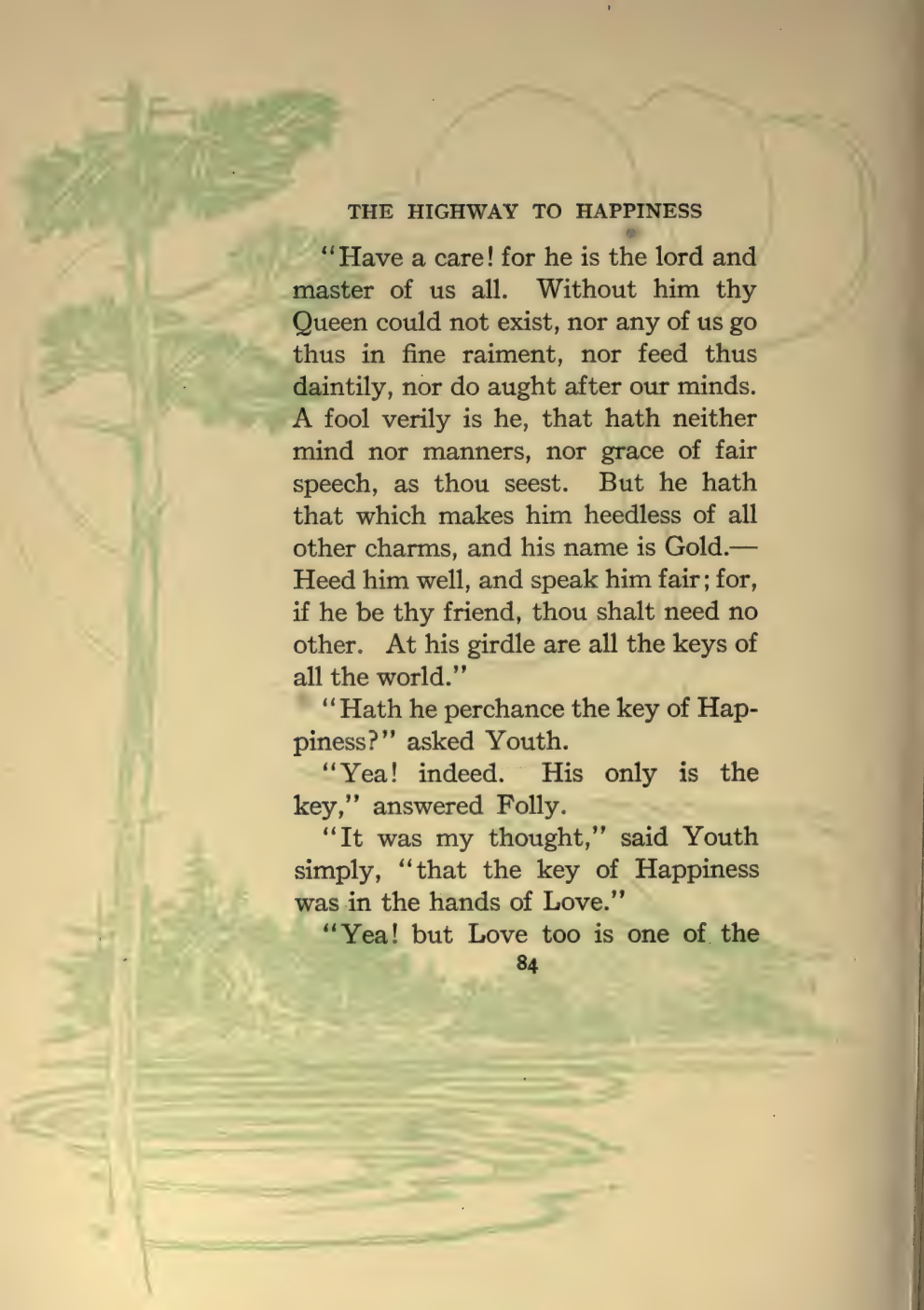
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

name of the Queen, and she laughingly made answer:

"Wit is his name. His business is to turn words topsy-turvy, like a juggler, and to make nonsense of language. The less meaning his speech hath, the more acceptable it is to those that listen, and, indeed, though no one listens, he is happy—just to be talking. You will understand him some day, and be glad of his mad tongue. He is a very weary man, therefore makes he so strangely merry."

"And who and what is yonder lord arrayed all in gold and jewels that glanceth so haughtily about him, and is sought of many, yet scarcely deigneth speech to any?" asked Youth innocently.

Thereat the Queen set her finger on lip, smiling archly, and answered under her breath:



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

"Have a care! for he is the lord and master of us all. Without him thy Queen could not exist, nor any of us go thus in fine raiment, nor feed thus daintily, nor do aught after our minds. A fool verily is he, that hath neither mind nor manners, nor grace of fair speech, as thou seest. But he hath that which makes him heedless of all other charms, and his name is Gold.—Heed him well, and speak him fair; for, if he be thy friend, thou shalt need no other. At his girdle are all the keys of all the world."

"Hath he perchance the key of Happiness?" asked Youth.

"Yea! indeed. His only is the key," answered Folly.

"It was my thought," said Youth simply, "that the key of Happiness was in the hands of Love."

"Yea! but Love too is one of the

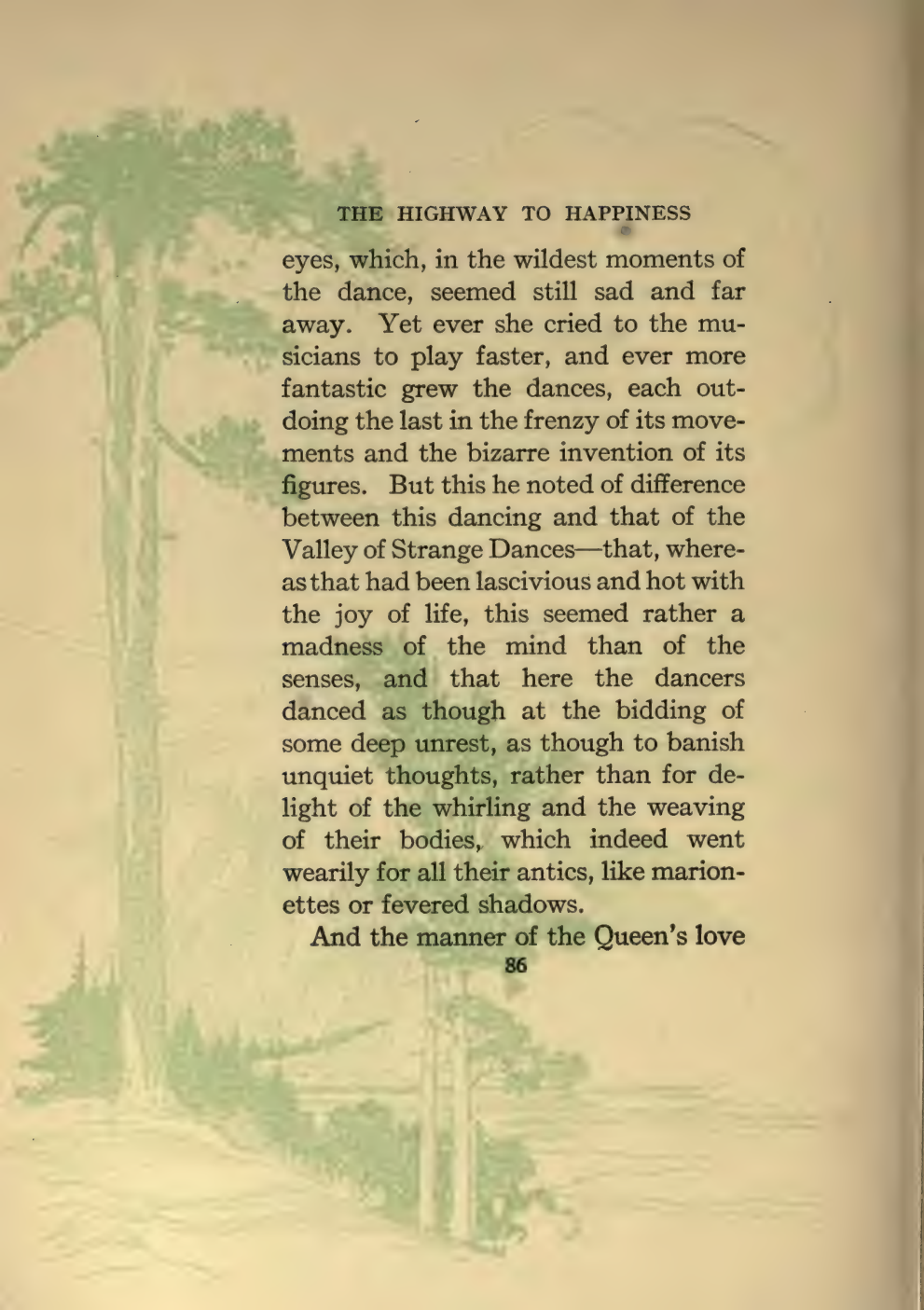
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

pensioners of that same lord of Gold. Yonder crazy fellow called Poetry, who you see blowing those rainbow bubbles with words, will tell you otherwise, but it is his business to lie beautifully about everything. That is why he is so charming. He is glad enough to flatter Gold with the rest, when his purse is empty, or he needs a new doublet."

"I like him not, for all that," said Youth bluntly.

"That is because you are yet a child," answered Folly, smiling understandingly on him, "and have yet no need of him."

Presently they made an end of feasting, and the Queen called for the musicians, and the company fell to dancing, and Youth and the Queen trod many measures together, and ever more and more he loved her strange



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

eyes, which, in the wildest moments of the dance, seemed still sad and far away. Yet ever she cried to the musicians to play faster, and ever more fantastic grew the dances, each outdoing the last in the frenzy of its movements and the bizarre invention of its figures. But this he noted of difference between this dancing and that of the Valley of Strange Dances—that, whereas that had been lascivious and hot with the joy of life, this seemed rather a madness of the mind than of the senses, and that here the dancers danced as though at the bidding of some deep unrest, as though to banish unquiet thoughts, rather than for delight of the whirling and the weaving of their bodies, which indeed went wearily for all their antics, like marionettes or fevered shadows.

And the manner of the Queen's love

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

for him seemed even as the dancing. Little amorous it seemed, but full of whim and fancy, as one should play a game less for the game's sake than to be playing it with a new playmate; and ever she looked into the face of Youth to mark the wonder there at the strangeness and newness of all that to her was long since weary and old. More like a wild sister to him than a sweetheart seemed Queen Folly, yet she had very tender ways with her to twine about the heart, and, as she lay in Youth's arms and sobbed against his breast the sorrow she kept hidden all the day, very dear she seemed to him, and happiness enough indeed it seemed to kiss away her tears, and devise new ways of laughter for her with the dawn.


Now the day that followed was the day on which Youth, in company with

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

his friends, had been wont to worship God, and, in the simplicity of his heart, he said somewhat of this to the Queen, and the courtiers that were standing about heard him and broke into laughter, and Youth blushed with shame at their mockery; but the Queen checked them, and called to her side a grave, courtly man, of a lofty, serene, yet withal worldly, countenance, by name Philosophy.

"This is my spiritual adviser," said the Queen smiling; "he shall discourse to us of the religion of Folly. I delight to hear him speak. No one talks so beautifully of the gods."

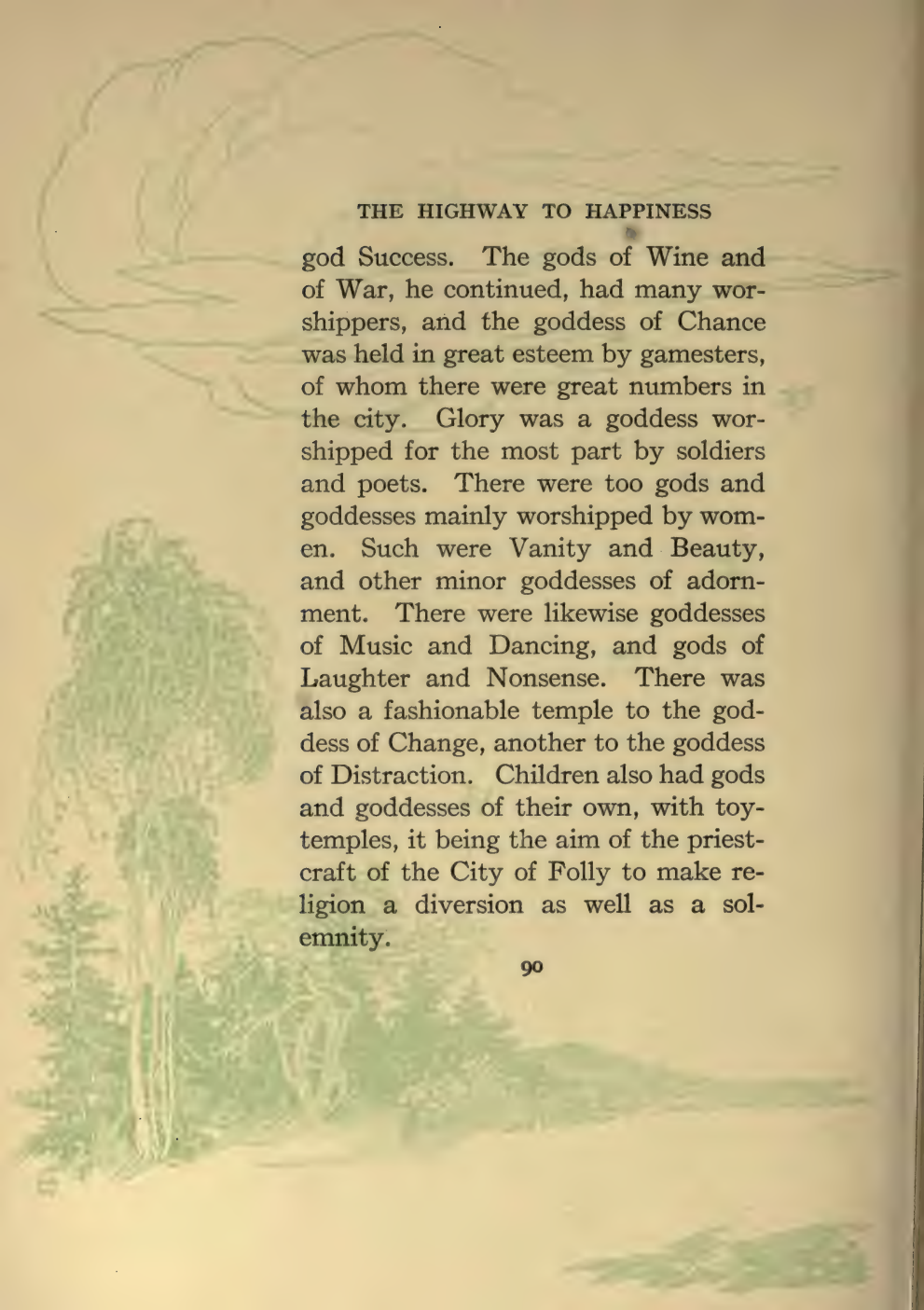
And thereon with a calm voice, musical and persuasive, he whom the Queen had named Philosophy proceeded to explain that the "God" of whom Youth had spoken was no longer



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

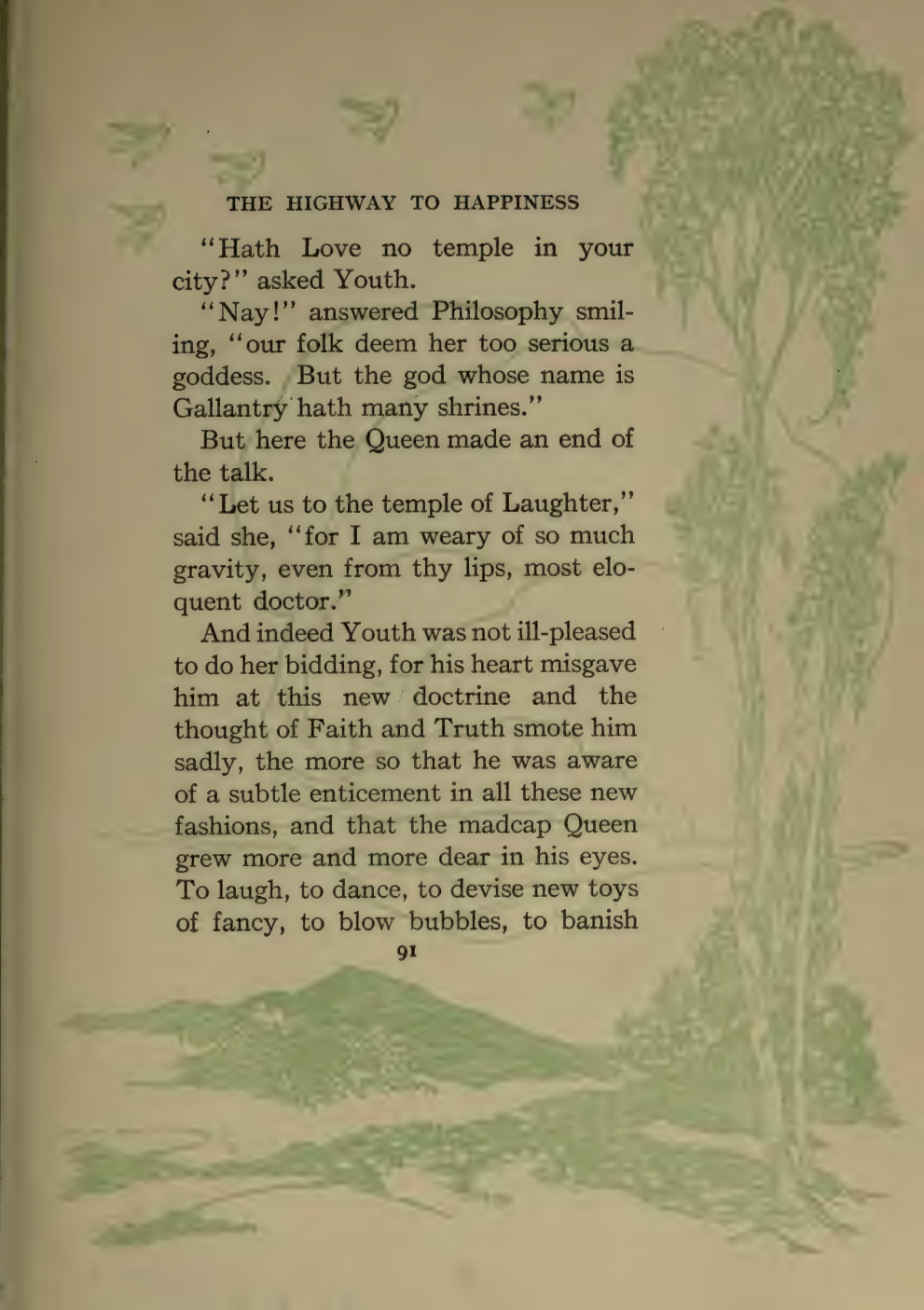
worshipped in the City of Folly. Only the country folk and some of the common people still believed in him; but the learned men of the City of Folly had long since proved that he had no existence. On the other hand, they had made discoveries of other gods of whose existence and whose powers there was no doubt. These gods answered to the needs and characters of their various worshippers, and the learned men were discovering new gods almost every day. They were all gods of the heart's desire, and each man worshipped the god that was most like himself. Some rich men had gods whom they allowed no one to worship save themselves, and none of the gods was worshipped of all the people save the god Mammon, whose high priest was Gold.

Next after him in power was the



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

god Success. The gods of Wine and of War, he continued, had many worshippers, and the goddess of Chance was held in great esteem by gamesters, of whom there were great numbers in the city. Glory was a goddess worshipped for the most part by soldiers and poets. There were too gods and goddesses mainly worshipped by women. Such were Vanity and Beauty, and other minor goddesses of adornment. There were likewise goddesses of Music and Dancing, and gods of Laughter and Nonsense. There was also a fashionable temple to the goddess of Change, another to the goddess of Distraction. Children also had gods and goddesses of their own, with toy-temples, it being the aim of the priesthood of the City of Folly to make religion a diversion as well as a solemnity.



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

"Hath Love no temple in your city?" asked Youth.

"Nay!" answered Philosophy smiling, "our folk deem her too serious a goddess. But the god whose name is Gallantry hath many shrines."

But here the Queen made an end of the talk.

"Let us to the temple of Laughter," said she, "for I am weary of so much gravity, even from thy lips, most eloquent doctor."

And indeed Youth was not ill-pleased to do her bidding, for his heart misgave him at this new doctrine and the thought of Faith and Truth smote him sadly, the more so that he was aware of a subtle enticement in all these new fashions, and that the madcap Queen grew more and more dear in his eyes. To laugh, to dance, to devise new toys of fancy, to blow bubbles, to banish



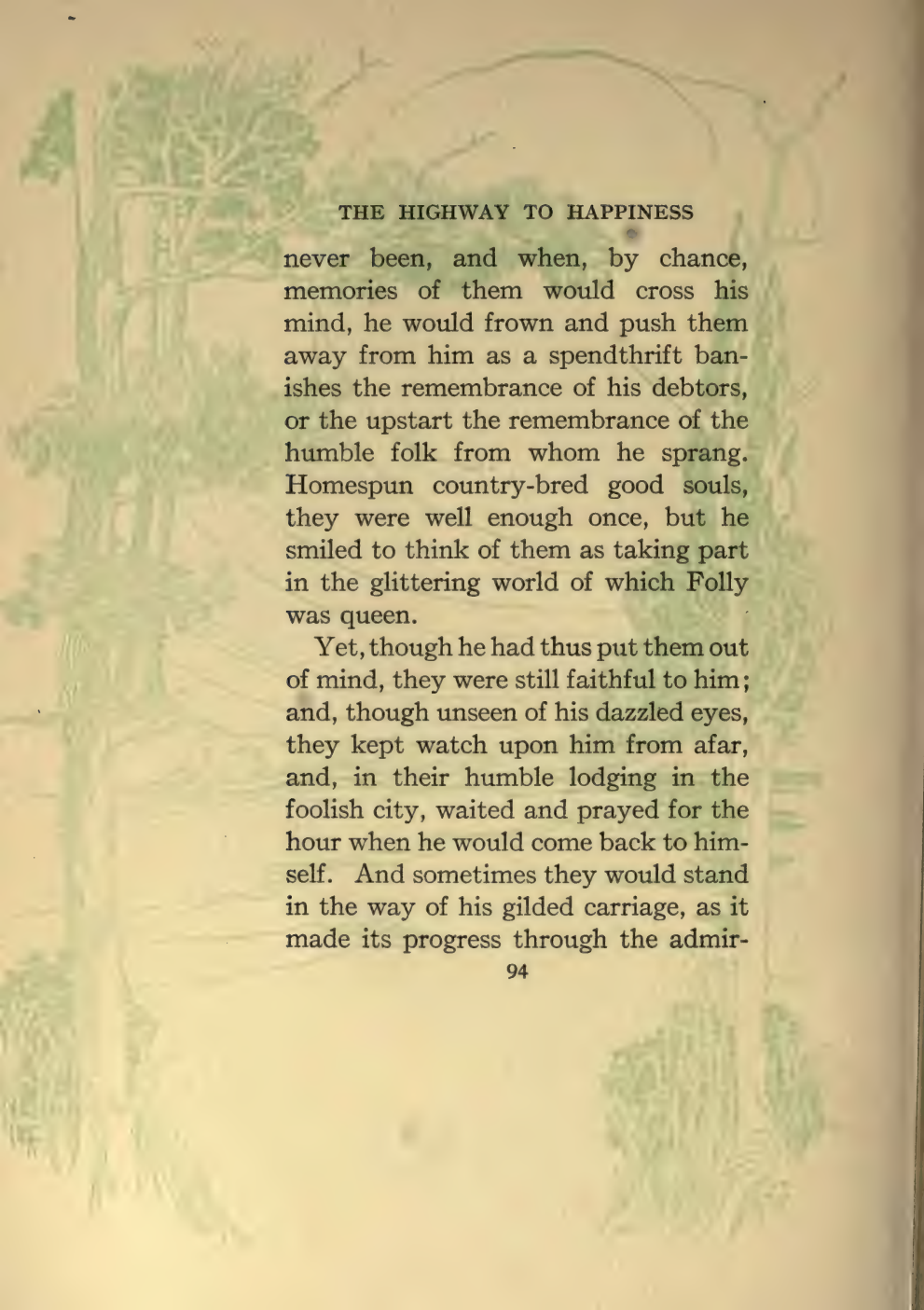
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

care, and live in the rainbow moment, with so fair a creature for one's play-mate—was he likely to find a better happiness than this?

Even as these first days, so were the days that followed, and each day the ways and customs that had at first seemed strange and fantastic to Youth grew more and more to seem wonted and natural and after his own heart, so that, whereas at his coming he had been simple of mind and modest of carriage, it was but a short while ere of all the Queen's courtiers he was held for the most bold and polished of address, and most high fantastical in his manners and desires. In the foppery and extravagance of his dress he exceeded beyond any, so that Fashion was hard put to it to devise new conceits of apparel to his pleasure, and the most subtle cooks vied with each other

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

to pamper his curiosity for strange new dishes. Likewise in all the far-sought mummeries and masquings, the mad-cap games and witty inventions, the caperings and zig-zaggeries of the mind in which Queen Folly took most delight he was skilled beyond all others; so that the Queen's pleasure and content in him grew more from day to day. Never, said she, had the goddess of Distraction sent her a playfellow that was his like. And the things that he had loved aforetime faded out of his heart, and little semblance he bore, in his silken braveries and his worldly coxcomberies of speech and living, to the Youth who, that far away morning, had gazed with such frank eyes along the shining road. Alas! too, for the friends to whom he had made that vow of faithful comradeship. Forgotten were they indeed as though they had



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

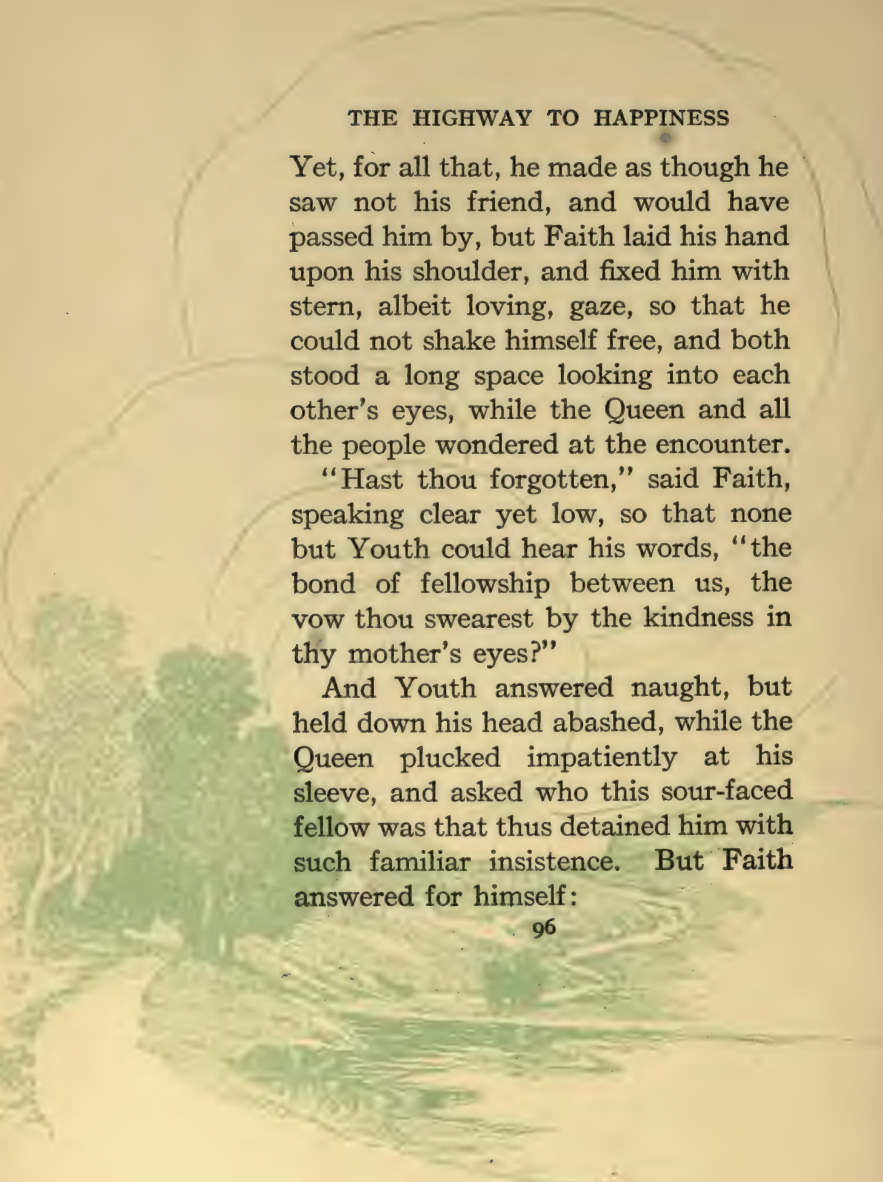
never been, and when, by chance, memories of them would cross his mind, he would frown and push them away from him as a spendthrift banishes the remembrance of his debtors, or the upstart the remembrance of the humble folk from whom he sprang. Homespun country-bred good souls, they were well enough once, but he smiled to think of them as taking part in the glittering world of which Folly was queen.

Yet, though he had thus put them out of mind, they were still faithful to him; and, though unseen of his dazzled eyes, they kept watch upon him from afar, and, in their humble lodging in the foolish city, waited and prayed for the hour when he would come back to himself. And sometimes they would stand in the way of his gilded carriage, as it made its progress through the admir-

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

ing throng, hoping perchance that their wistful faces might meet his gaze and touch him to remembrance. But, if he saw them, he made no sign, ever hardening his heart.

Yet there came a day when Faith, the most stalwart of the three, placed himself on the steps of the temple of Vanity, whither Youth and Queen Folly had gone a-worshipping one bright morning. Regardless of the gibes of the wanton crowd, Faith stood there, a lonely steadfast figure, and awaited the moment when Youth should pass down the marble steps to his carriage. At last he came, holding the Queen by the hand, and laughing gaily in courtier wise, very splendid in his butterfly apparel. Suddenly his eyes fell upon Faith standing firmly in his path, and his laughter ceased and his cheek flushed deep with shame.



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

Yet, for all that, he made as though he saw not his friend, and would have passed him by, but Faith laid his hand upon his shoulder, and fixed him with stern, albeit loving, gaze, so that he could not shake himself free, and both stood a long space looking into each other's eyes, while the Queen and all the people wondered at the encounter.

"Hast thou forgotten," said Faith, speaking clear yet low, so that none but Youth could hear his words, "the bond of fellowship between us, the vow thou swearest by the kindness in thy mother's eyes?"

And Youth answered naught, but held down his head abashed, while the Queen plucked impatiently at his sleeve, and asked who this sour-faced fellow was that thus detained him with such familiar insistence. But Faith answered for himself:

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

"Harlot," said he, "I am the memory of God in his heart," and then, turning to Youth again, he said:

"I go now, but I shall be with thee again in the dawn." With that he turned and vanished in the crowd and the Queen and Youth entered the carriage and were borne away to the palace. *C* But neither spake as they passed thither, for there was that in the countenance of Faith that stilled the tongue of the mocker, and also it seemed to the Queen that she too had known those noble starlit eyes long ago. As for Youth, they seemed to be turned upon him with steady sorrowful gaze through all the following hours of that day, nor could he escape from them, do what he might, or by manner of mirth or foolishness. Even in the night, filled with troubled dreams, it seemed as though they still



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

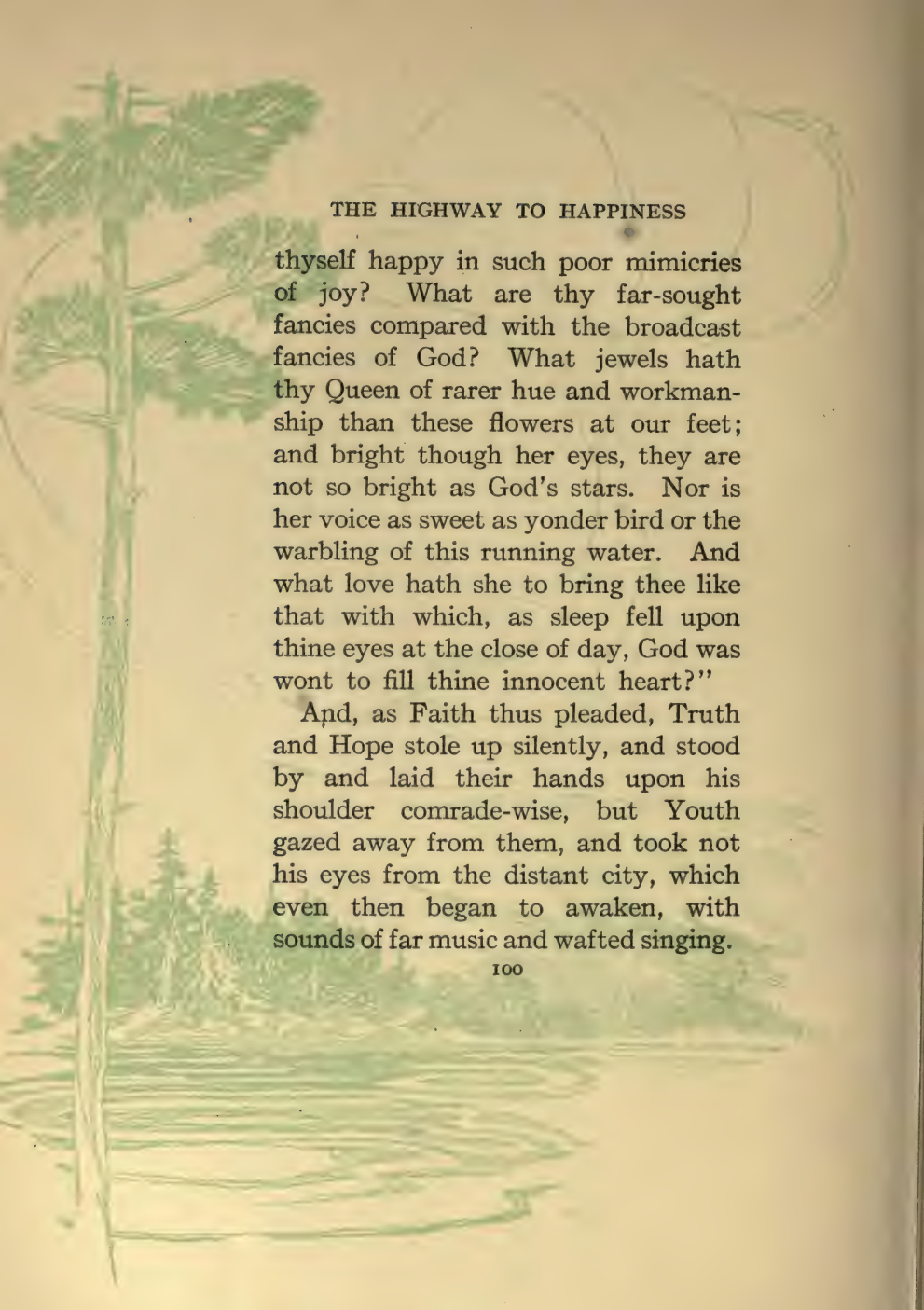
kept a strong guard over him, and, when he awakened in the dawn, it was even as Faith had said, for there by his bedside stood the blue-clad figure of his friend, as long ago he had stood and called him in the Valley of Strange Dances. Even as then, he bade him rise and come away, and such were the power of suasion and the pleading of old affection in his heart, that Youth arose and passed out with him into the morning air.

The sun was rising over the rim of the world, and the whole earth was fresh and radiant with the dew, and lilting with the songs of birds. The City of Folly still slept, weary with the revelry of the night that was gone, and only the innocent lives of field and wood were abroad, and the winds of heaven moving pure and fragrant as the breath of God. Faith and Youth

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

walked on through a meadow enamelled with flowers, by the side of a stream that rippled sweetly past rushes and water-flags; and came at length to the top of a green hill whence they could see all the fair landscape spread out beneath them and the road once more winding on and on into the beautiful distance. From a little way off floated the silver chime of a chapel bell, calling to morning prayer, and with it came to Youth the thought of the holy men with whom he had so-journed for a while, and all the peace and purity of their lives, and he sighed sorely, so that Faith turned to him gently and said:

“Art thou not weary of the false pleasures of yonder city? Canst thou behold this fair scene, and breathe this sweet air, or gaze into yonder blue deeps where God dwells, and deem



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

thyself happy in such poor mimicries of joy? What are thy far-sought fancies compared with the broadcast fancies of God? What jewels hath thy Queen of rarer hue and workmanship than these flowers at our feet; and bright though her eyes, they are not so bright as God's stars. Nor is her voice as sweet as yonder bird or the warbling of this running water. And what love hath she to bring thee like that with which, as sleep fell upon thine eyes at the close of day, God was wont to fill thine innocent heart?"

And, as Faith thus pleaded, Truth and Hope stole up silently, and stood by and laid their hands upon his shoulder comrade-wise, but Youth gazed away from them, and took not his eyes from the distant city, which even then began to awaken, with sounds of far music and wafted singing.

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

"Hast thou seen the sorrow and pain," then spake Truth, "that lie hidden under all that music and singing? Hast thou seen the wan women stitching night and day upon the vain gew-gaws that thou flauntest in, with nought but a mouthful of food for their wage? Hast thou thought of the men that toil in the nether darkness of underground pits and tunnels, seeing never the light of day, that thou shalt shine with jewels, and eat from silver and gold? Hast thou heard the children crying for bread, as thou and thy Queen, seated upon ivory thrones, eat strange dishes whereof Hunger and Death are the purveyors, and drink from delicate cups the red wine of the anguish of men?"

But Youth answered never a word, nor took his eyes from the glittering city.



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

"Hast thou forgotten," then said Hope softly, "thy dream of a young mother that gave suck, and babes at play about thy knees?"

Thereat Youth turned and looked into Hope's eyes for a moment and smiled sadly, for Hope seemed still dear to him; but from the other two his heart was strangely gone, and while they spake, though he answered nought, he seemed to hear cold voices of denial within himself that were and yet were not he, and he was aware for the first time that some mysterious change had come over him since he had become the playfellow of Folly, as though he had turned inwardly to stone. For none of all these matters of which Faith and Truth had spoken, which formerly had moved him to delight and pity, stirred or touched him any more. The God of whom Faith spoke in such

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

thrilling wise, and to whom he had aforetime lifted up his prayer night and morn, knowing his living presence in all things, was to him now but as an empty word. He had set the false gods of Folly in His place, and their hollow ritual was all his worshipping. Nor did Nature, with her fair and fragrant presences, seem delightful any more. Music of bird and stream, flash of dew-drop, or painted glory of flower, the green velvet of meadows, and the blue spaces of the sky—for these he had nor ear nor eye any more. But rather, while Faith had been speaking, he had loved in fancy the precious coloured stones and strange eyes of the Queen beyond flower or star, and hankered all the while after the masquings and the mummings and all the unresting rainbow wheel of fantastic days and nights which had now become his life. Alas!

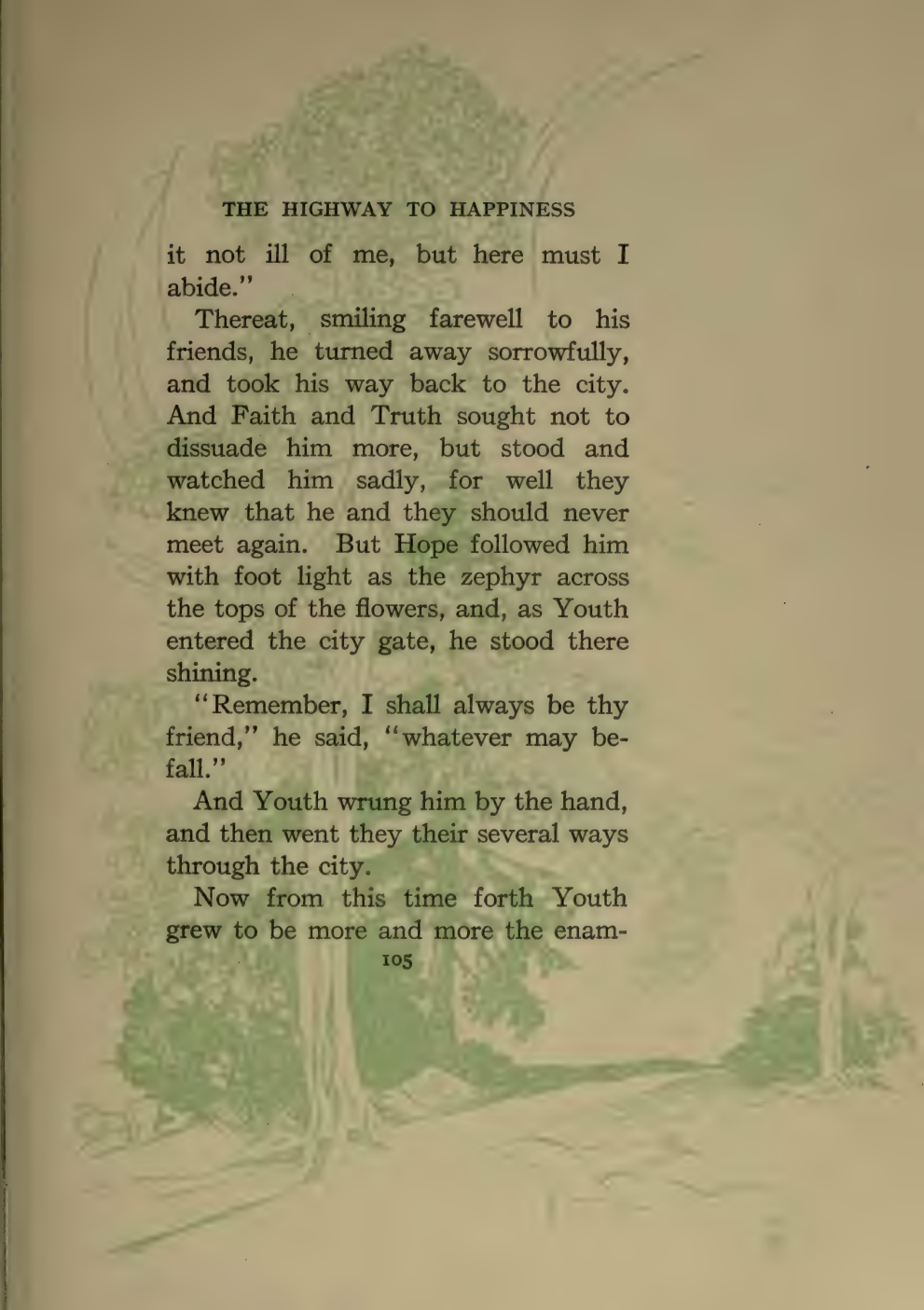


THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

for all Faith's words, nothing like so desirable to him seemed this sweet-smelling meadow as the perfumed chamber of the Queen; nor did the words of Truth stir him to any pity, he who had once been so tender of heart, and ready with the quick-sprung tear.

Yet, for all this, he marvelled much to himself at this change that had overtaken him, and it seemed as though he were two selves, one of which stood apart and looked on sorrowfully at the other. Yet had this self that looked on no power over his fellow, and his sorrow availed nought to warm again his cold heart, or relume that light of his soul that burned no longer within him.

"Alas! I know not how it is, but I cannot go with you," said Youth, after a space; "I prithee, good friends, take



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

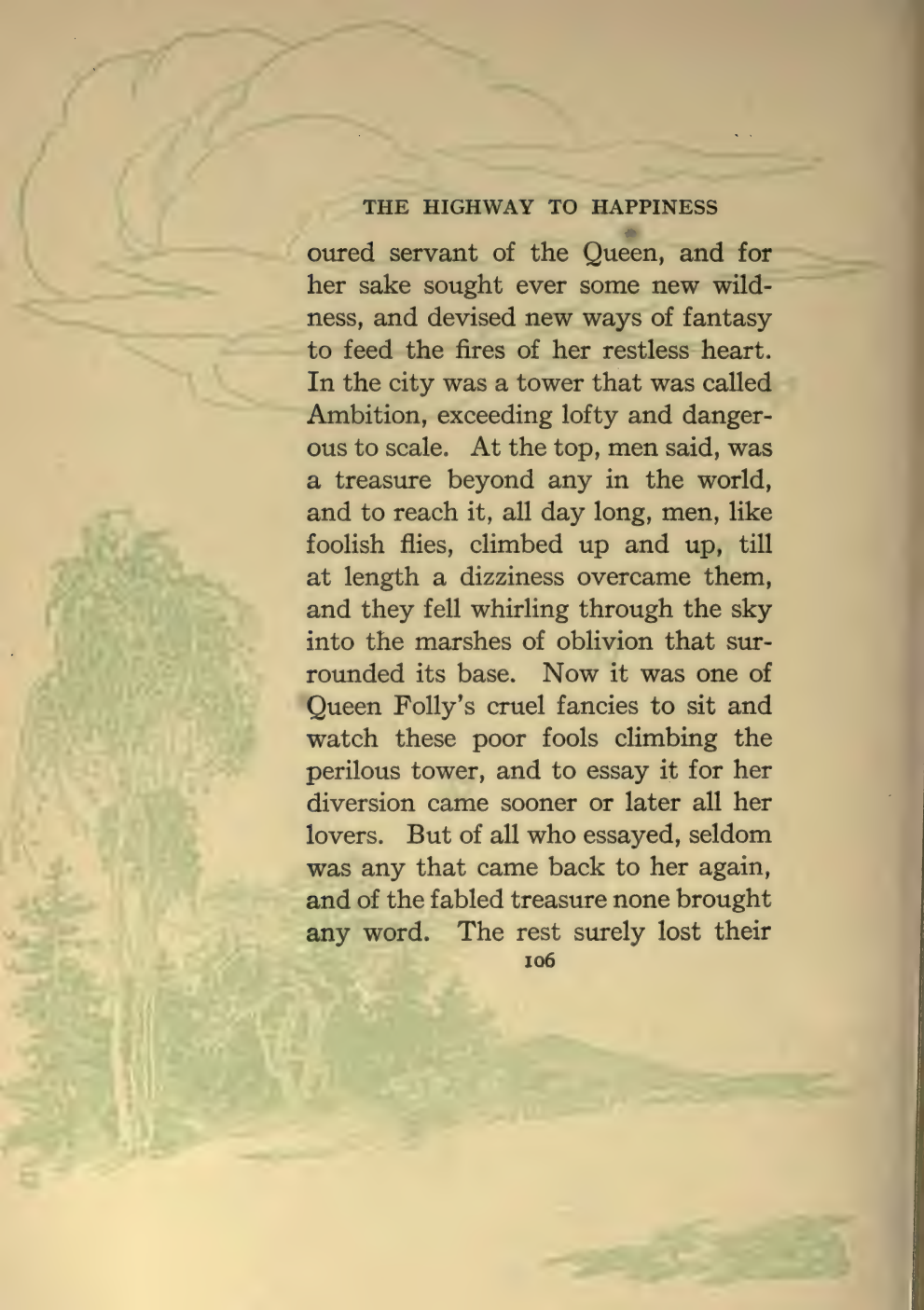
it not ill of me, but here must I abide."

Thereat, smiling farewell to his friends, he turned away sorrowfully, and took his way back to the city. And Faith and Truth sought not to dissuade him more, but stood and watched him sadly, for well they knew that he and they should never meet again. But Hope followed him with foot light as the zephyr across the tops of the flowers, and, as Youth entered the city gate, he stood there shining.

"Remember, I shall always be thy friend," he said, "whatever may befall."

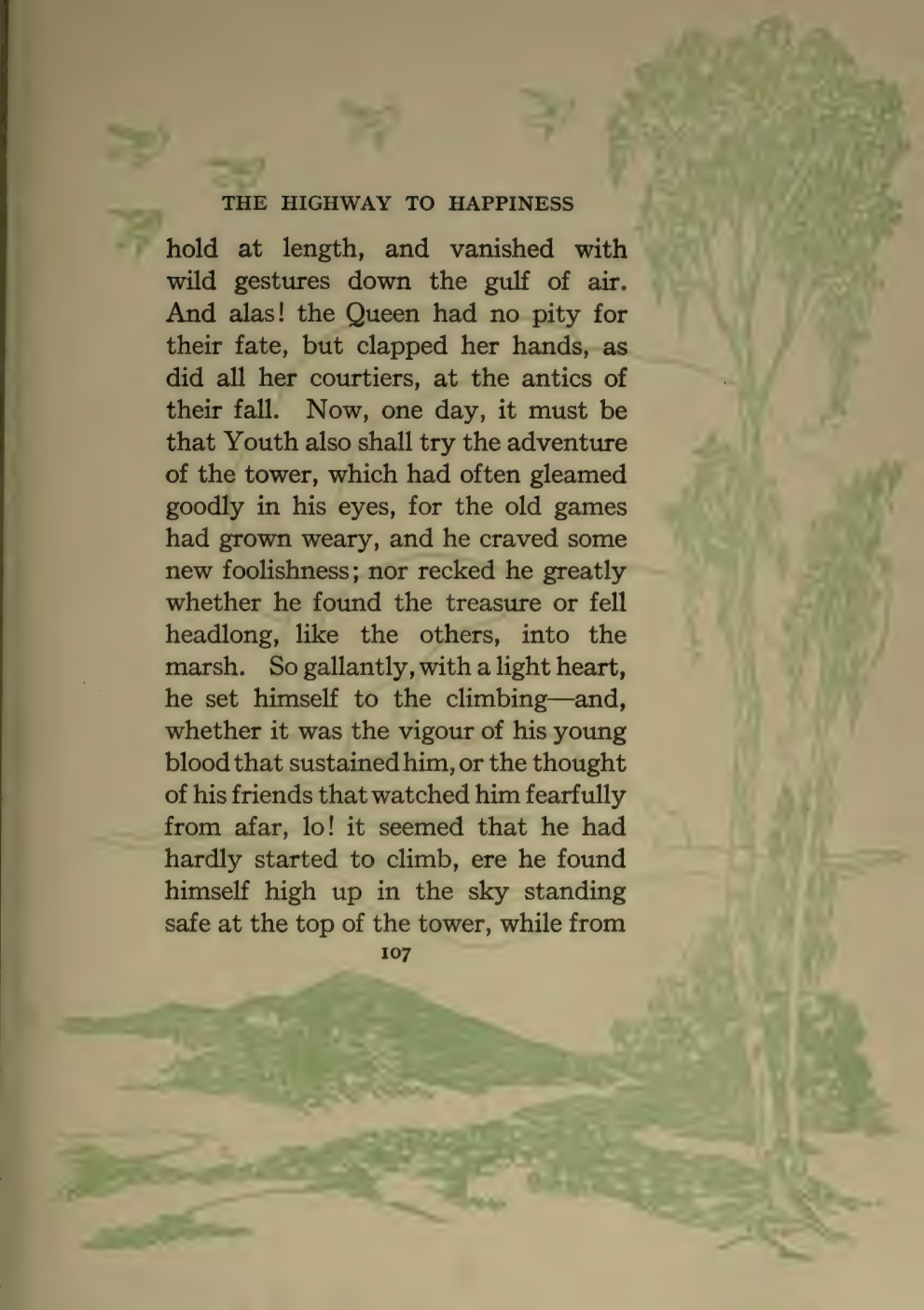
And Youth wrung him by the hand, and then went they their several ways through the city.

Now from this time forth Youth grew to be more and more the enam-



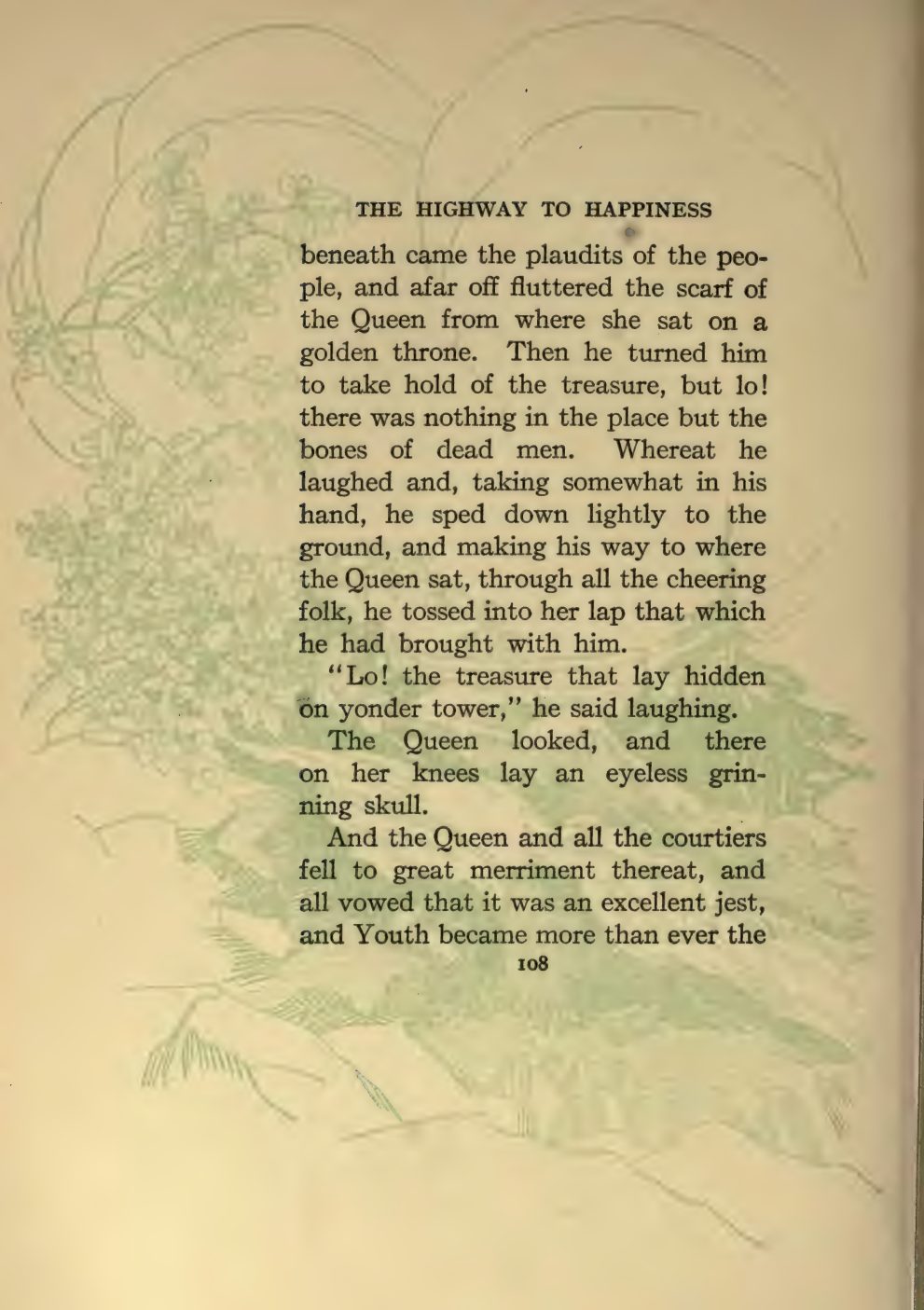
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

oured servant of the Queen, and for her sake sought ever some new wildness, and devised new ways of fantasy to feed the fires of her restless heart. In the city was a tower that was called Ambition, exceeding lofty and dangerous to scale. At the top, men said, was a treasure beyond any in the world, and to reach it, all day long, men, like foolish flies, climbed up and up, till at length a dizziness overcame them, and they fell whirling through the sky into the marshes of oblivion that surrounded its base. Now it was one of Queen Folly's cruel fancies to sit and watch these poor fools climbing the perilous tower, and to essay it for her diversion came sooner or later all her lovers. But of all who essayed, seldom was any that came back to her again, and of the fabled treasure none brought any word. The rest surely lost their



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

hold at length, and vanished with wild gestures down the gulf of air. And alas! the Queen had no pity for their fate, but clapped her hands, as did all her courtiers, at the antics of their fall. Now, one day, it must be that Youth also shall try the adventure of the tower, which had often gleamed goodly in his eyes, for the old games had grown weary, and he craved some new foolishness; nor recked he greatly whether he found the treasure or fell headlong, like the others, into the marsh. So gallantly, with a light heart, he set himself to the climbing—and, whether it was the vigour of his young blood that sustained him, or the thought of his friends that watched him fearfully from afar, lo! it seemed that he had hardly started to climb, ere he found himself high up in the sky standing safe at the top of the tower, while from



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

beneath came the plaudits of the people, and afar off fluttered the scarf of the Queen from where she sat on a golden throne. Then he turned him to take hold of the treasure, but lo! there was nothing in the place but the bones of dead men. Whereat he laughed and, taking somewhat in his hand, he sped down lightly to the ground, and making his way to where the Queen sat, through all the cheering folk, he tossed into her lap that which he had brought with him.

"Lo! the treasure that lay hidden on yonder tower," he said laughing.

The Queen looked, and there on her knees lay an eyeless grinning skull.

And the Queen and all the courtiers fell to great merriment thereat, and all vowed that it was an excellent jest, and Youth became more than ever the

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

favourite of the Queen for this perilously played conceit of his.

Of all the temples in the City of Folly that of the goddess of Chance was in most favour of all orders of the people, and in the humblest home as in the most splendid palace there were to be found, at all times of the day and night, eager hollow-eyed worshippers crowded about the whirling wheel which was the symbol of her worship. To be forever winning or losing her favour was the breath of life to these mad folk, and no pile of gold was high enough to stay this fever; but he to whom the whirling of the wheel had brought it must either multiply it over and over again or lose it altogether; and of all these gamesters Youth was the wildest and most daring. There was nothing that he accounted dear or sacred that, when the

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

madness was on him, he would not adventure on a turn of the strange wheel; for more than all else he valued the dizzy moment ere the wheel had stopped whirling and the heart stood still in the expectancy of the hazard. By reason of his fearlessness, and his good fortune, he had grown richer than any other at the court saving only the lord of Gold himself; but, as him no man could overcome, Youth at length began to grow weary of this foolishness also. Yet there was one possession still left him, dimmed though it had long been, which he had not yet adventured, and one night as he and Gold watched the wheel together, all the courtiers looking on—

“What is that light in thy bosom?” asked Gold. “Whatever it be, I will wager thee for it with half my wealth.”

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

Now that light in Youth's bosom was his soul; but so strongly wrought the madness in him in that moment that he regarded not the impiety, but said—

“So let it be”; and the wheel turned a while and stopped, and a shudder passed through even those giddy-pated courtiers, for Youth had lost his soul; and henceforth it was in the keeping of the lord of Gold.

But only the Queen seemed to rejoice, though in a wild, half-sad way.

“Now indeed,” said she, “art thou my companion.”

And so passed the months, yea! and the years, in the City of Folly, and it seemed to Youth that he had never known any other life than this, nor in truth desired any other. And always the Queen and he grew dearer one to the other, and more of one mind and

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

heart. Yet would it happen sometimes, though indeed but seldom, when the piping of the spring was heard over the land, and the blown blossom would drift like pink snow through the palace gardens, and the nightingale would sing to the rose under his chamber window; or, again, when autumn came sighing and rustling her haunted robe about the pleasaunce, and the surface of the fish ponds grew littered with yellow leaves—then would it happen that old memories that had seemed dead would stir, and the thought of that happiness he had never found would come to him again. And at such times he would fancy that he caught a glimpse of Hope peering at him from the shrubberies; but the faces of Faith and Truth he saw no more.

Now, after a long time it befell that

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

word came to Queen Folly of a neighbouring prince, how he had talked despitefully of her beauty, and averred that his own lady was fairer to look on than she, and other such matters. When the Queen had heard this, she had fallen anon to weeping and anon to anger, and the world was darkened before her, and she found comfort in nothing; for her beauty was to her as her very life. Then Youth, seeing her sorrow, cast about how he might work her solace.

"Were I to bring thee the head of yonder insolent at my saddlebow," said he to the Queen, "would the sight seem good to thee, and thine eyes smile upon thy people again."

"Ah!" said the Queen gleefully, "'tis well thought of thee, but thou shalt not do battle alone. Thou and I will go forth side by side at the head



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

of a great army, and we will lay waste his lands, and burn his towers, and thou shalt do with him even as thou sayest. And thou shalt know the beauty and glory of war."

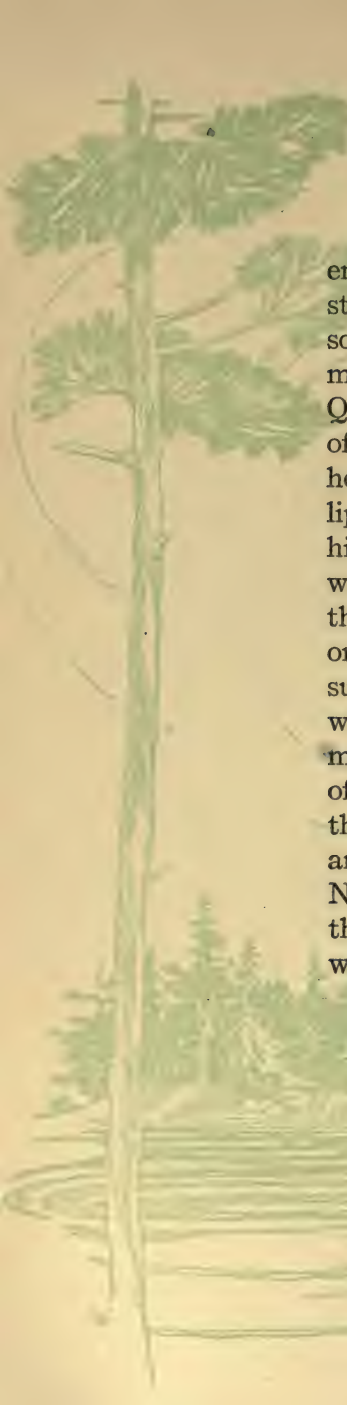
The word went forth, and it was strange to see and hear the joy of the people as they prepared them to go forth to battle and death. And the Queen made a gift to Youth of golden armour, which, with her maidens, she helped do upon him and lace with her own hands. Came at length the morning of setting out, and Youth and Queen went before the host riding on white horses, and surely they were lovely to look on, and, what with the spears and the banners and the trumpets, goodly indeed was the array of Queen Folly's army and bravely it glittered in the sun. And that night as Youth lay in Folly's arms, he be-

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

held her beauty by the light of burning villages.

"I warrant his lady's eyes are not so bright as my torches," said Folly with a wicked laugh.

Of all the passions which had, from time to time, taken possession of the spirit of Youth, none had filled him with so great a madness as this of war, and no intoxication of the beauty of woman, or of the strength of wine, or of the dizziness of ambition, or of the whirling of the wheel of chance, had equalled the intoxication of the slaying of men, the terrible rhythm of swords, and the wild tides of battle. And always he was foremost in the charge, shining in his golden armour like a young god, and, as though by enchantment, coming out unscathed from the fiercest press of the fight. And sweet it seemed to him at the



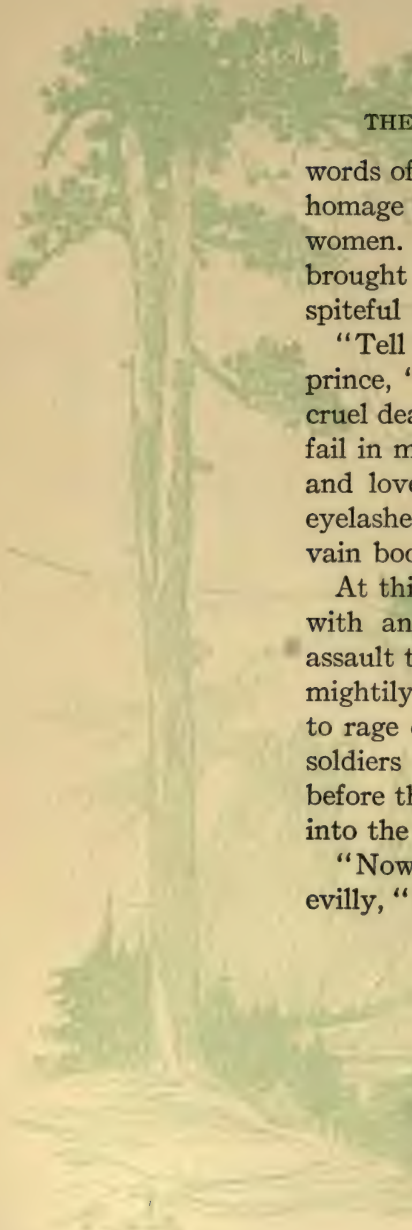
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

ending of the hard fought day, as the stars came out over the wailing field, sown thick with the bodies of slain men, to kneel for the praise of the Queen, as she sat enthroned on a hill of corpses, with a wicked laughter in her eyes, and a song of triumph on her lips. Then would she make much of him, and call him her champion, and wreath his brows with laurel. And this, said she, was Glory, that light on the deeds of men, that hath more suitors than any woman, a wilder wine than Love's, a madness exalting man to the divine. And from the cup of Glory she held up to him among the torches he drank deep and long, and deemed indeed that he was a god. Nor did the cries of broken men, nor the terror of widowed and childless women stir any pity in his breast, nor

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

did it seem strange to him that because of the flouting of one woman's beauty should come all this work of blood and burning towns. But, day after day, he added slaughter to slaughter and destruction to destruction, till all the fair lands of the prince against whom they were warring were laid waste, and nothing remained of all his possessions but one city in which he and his dear lady, whose beauty he had praised above the beauty of the Queen, were now entrenched.

Thither came riding Queen Folly at length, Youth splendid by her side, and soon the walls of the city were girt about with her sounding army, and no escape was there for the prince and his people save by surrender or death. Then the Queen sent a herald offering peace, if but the prince would unsay the



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

words of affront to her beauty, and do homage to her as the fairest of mortal women. But for answer the herald brought back words even more despicable than the first.

"Tell your queen," had said the prince, "that I should count the most cruel death a joyous thing ere I should fail in my troth towards my true love and loveliest of ladies, one of whose eyelashes excels in beauty the whole vain body of your queen."

At this the Queen was beside herself with anger, and gave order for the assault to sound with all speed, and so mightily did the Queen's anger seem to rage even through the veins of her soldiers that ere long the gates fell before their fury, and the Queen swept into the town in triumph.

"Now," said she to Youth, laughing evilly, "we shall see the manner of that

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

blinding beauty for which men are so eager to die."

About them thronged the people laying down their arms, and begging for mercy, but the prince and his lady were nowhere to be seen.

"It is little courteous of him to hide such beauty from us," mocked the Queen.

Then said one that the prince and his lady had shut themselves within their palace, and thither swept Youth with a following that soon brake down the doors, and, sword in hand, he sped up the staircases and from chamber to chamber seeking his victims. At length he came to two bronze doors that opened easily, as though without fear, and within was a great quietude. But two figures were there twined in each other's arms, a young man noble to look on, and a woman lovelier than

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

any Youth had seen or dreamed. And her long gold hair had fallen all about her lover's shoulders, and in her white bosom, encircled with her arm, lay a babe still pressing its lips to her flower-like breast. There was a smile on all their faces, as though in dying they had found a great peace, and as Youth and his following stood amazed before them, a great sorrow swept over the heart of Youth, and it seemed as though scales had fallen from his eyes. He saw himself as he was, foul and blood-stained, that had but now seemed gilded with glory, and in the anguish of his heart he understood that there before him lay slain, as by his own hand, that which all his life he had gone seeking.

Thereat he brake his sword over his knees, and, giving the pieces to one that stood by, he said:

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

"Take these to the Queen, and say to her that our war was indeed against a lovelier than she, and bid Queen Folly, if she dare, come look upon Love smiling in the arms of Death."

Then, no man detaining him, he went forth and, mingling with the press, disappeared none knew whither.

Now, after this, for many days, Youth wandered hither and thither as one that knew nought, heedless of light or dark, of hunger or cold, or the passing of time, but at length he came to himself, and saw that he was in a great wilderness, where was neither habitation of man, nor travelled highway. All about him stretched a desolate prospect of fens and sad unmoving waters, haunted by melancholy birds, and here and there were places of tum-



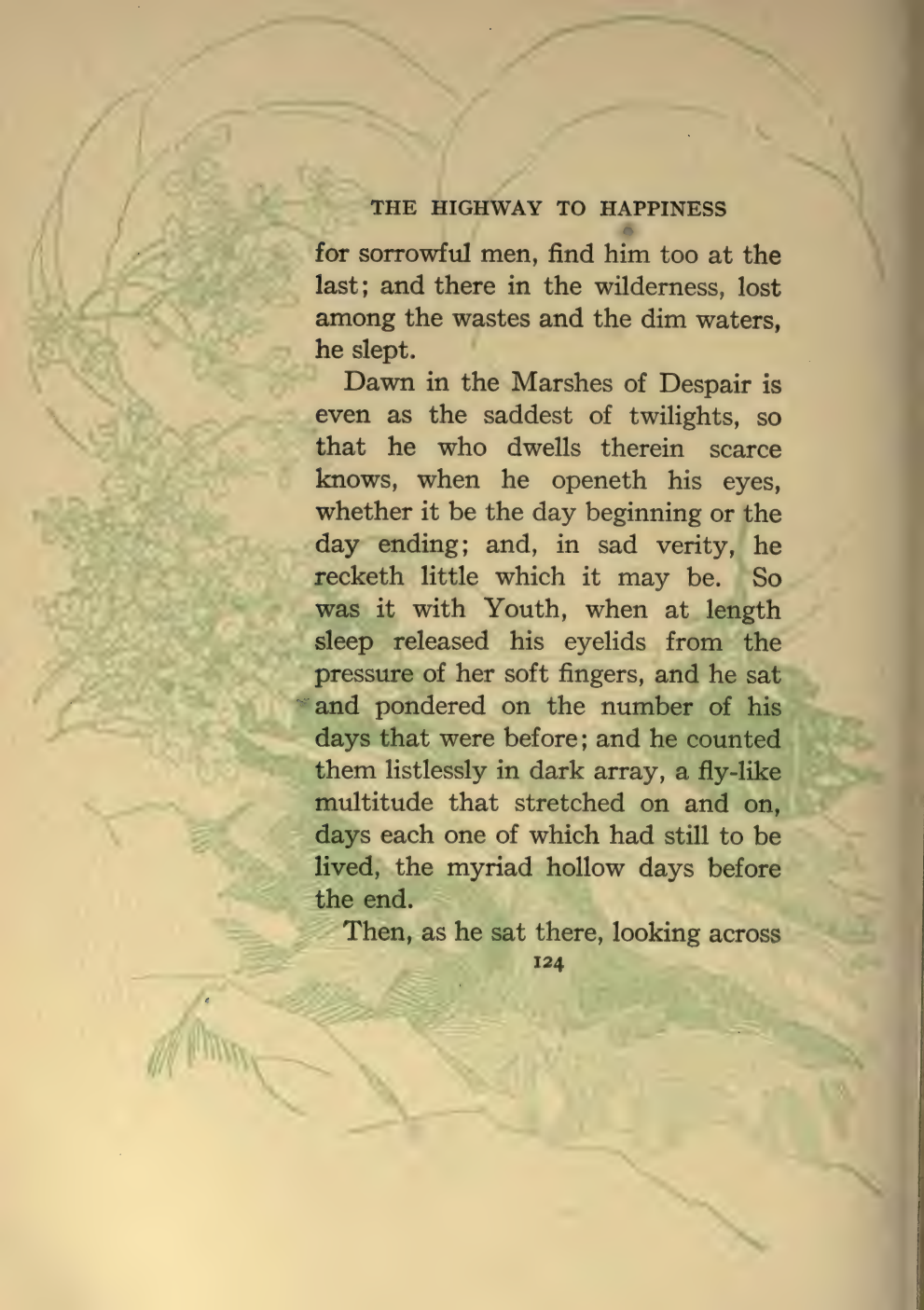
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

bled boulders, and patches of stunted woodland that wailed mournfully in the wind. But the dreariness irked him not, for it was even as that within himself, and there was in it a manner of companionship. It seemed to him that, though he still saw with his eyes and heard with his ears, he was already dead; for life, nor the desire of life, nor any other desire, moved him any more. Nor seemed sorrow even alive within him. But he sat there in the wilderness, like a hollow shade, a shape of nothingness. Where his soul had been was a blackness, and his heart was like an autumn garden filled with echoes. Alas! for him who had strode forth so blithely that far-off morning that all his travel must bring him at length to these Marshes of Despair. But there was a sort of dark



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

ease in his condition that sorted well with him, for sunshine or any manner of gladness would have seemed foolishness, and well pleased he was that no birds sang or flowers bloomed, and that when night fell there came no stars into his desolation. He craved not any more the lost faces of his friends. All he asked was to be left alone in the darkness, and of those whom he had come upon in his journeying the thought of one only found a welcome in his memory, he that had sat in the wayside inn and drunk that strange toast to the Winecup and the Grave. The thought of him was as the thought of a brother. Nor even did he crave for sleep, but sat wide-eyed looking out into the darkness. Yet must sleep, that walketh about the world, with poppies in her hands, tenderly seeking



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

for sorrowful men, find him too at the last; and there in the wilderness, lost among the wastes and the dim waters, he slept.

Dawn in the Marshes of Despair is even as the saddest of twilights, so that he who dwells therein scarce knows, when he openeth his eyes, whether it be the day beginning or the day ending; and, in sad verity, he recketh little which it may be. So was it with Youth, when at length sleep released his eyelids from the pressure of her soft fingers, and he sat and pondered on the number of his days that were before; and he counted them listlessly in dark array, a fly-like multitude that stretched on and on, days each one of which had still to be lived, the myriad hollow days before the end.

Then, as he sat there, looking across

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

the leaden waters into the leaden sky, he was aware of something that moved among the sedges, and lo! a face reared itself by his shoulder, and it was the face of a woman, with eyes blue-green as the backs of willow-leaves that whisper over graves. Her hair was like the shadows of cypress trees and smelt sweet of death, and her bosom was like the falling rose. Her voice seemed as the whispering of her hair, and it sounded fairer than all faces, and no musical instrument made out of reed or wood or thong had ever made a music like her speech.

"I heard thee," said she, "counting the tale of thy years, as one who would be rid of them. Listen! on my lips are the years that are gone. Give me but one kiss, and they are thine again—thine for one wild moment of Mem-

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

ory,—and the years that are to come shall be tossed like withered leaves into the fire."

And Youth looked upon the lips that spake, and he saw them burning sweet with spices of the Past, and he looked into the eyes and he saw fathom-deep the years that had gone; and surely to kiss those lips seemed a sweet and little thing; to gaze thus for one last moment of marvel in the face of the Wondrous Gone-By, and thus to miss The Endlessness of the Weariness To Come, surely it may well have seemed that which a sad man might gladly do.

No men save those who have fallen asleep to her singing have known how sweet is her song, She of the Sedges and the running water and the rocking reeds; and sweet indeed in the ears of Youth was her singing, so that his face

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

leaned towards her, and his lips drew close to hers. But it chanced that then he lifted his eyes and looked beyond where she raised herself to him out of the sedges, and surely there was one smiling at him that he had known of old. It was Hope, that, for all that he was made of the rainbow, had a steadfastness of heart which ever brought him across the weariest places, and lifted his feet over the longest hills. Yet even the face of Hope was sad because of the friend that he loved, and the peril that was his; for Hope also had known the face that raised her lips for the kiss of Youth. Sad, therefore, were the eyes of Hope, yet, as was his nature, his tongue was blithe, and across the leaden pool and the rustling sedges he sang to Youth this song:

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

I sing the face that has yet to be,
The day that has yet to flower,
The Truth that blooms out there be-
yond
The Lie of the Lonely Hour;

The Fairer years than the years gone
by,
The Future come at last,
And the Present a joy and a glory,
And the Beautiful Past—the Past.

As Youth listened to the singing of Hope, he forgot the face of her who had promised him forgetfulness in exchange for a kiss, and he rose from where he sat, and took Hope by the hand, and again they looked into each other's eyes. And Hope said:

"Knowest thou the name of her

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

who but now talked so soothingly to thee?"

"I know not," answered Youth, "yet seemed her voice sweet as the bees that murmur about the honeycombs of the dead, sweet as the talking of the leaves of the tall poplars lonely together in the blue air."

"Her name," said Hope, "is Suicide. Her song, sweet to your wearied ears as the song of the lark in the dawn, is the song of the worm that steals and fumbles blindly among graves. Her face is made of the rotting-away of lovely things, the flowers that have faded, the sunsets that have foundered in the rushes and the washing murmur of the marsh, the withering and the rustling of autumn, and the lost voices that call in the November tree-tops. She is the sad sister of courage, that



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

dares not wait for the morning gleam, yet fears less the dark places of the sea and the caves of the lonely hills. She is honoured among the dead, and sought among the living, because she fears not to dive into the shimmer of the unknown."

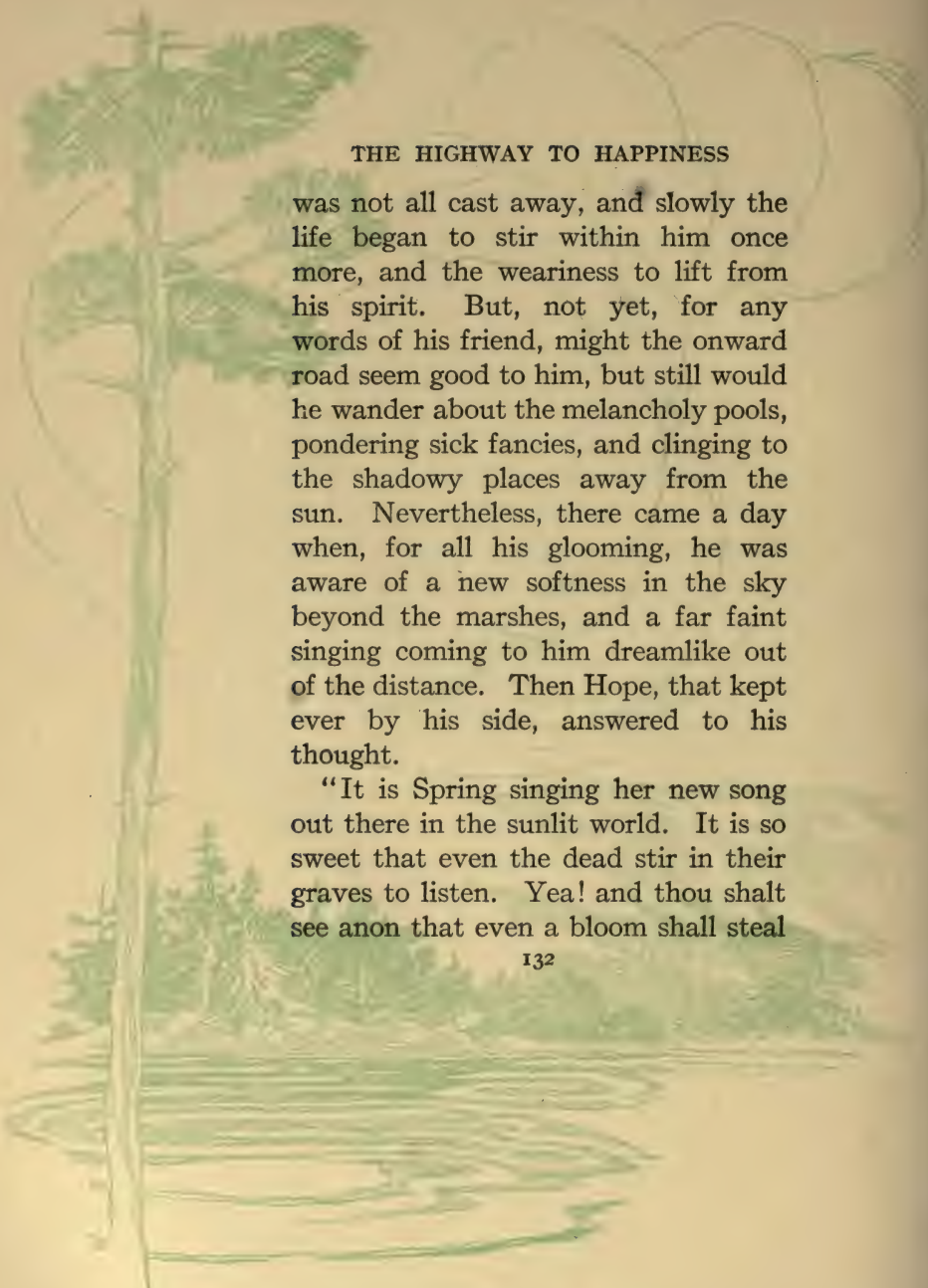
After that, they sat on for a long space, saying nought, while Youth gazed sad-eyed over the dreary waste, and at whiles Hope would touch his hand to companion him, and Youth was glad of his presence, but as yet his heart was far away from smiles or cheerful words.

"Said I not that I would be ever thy friend?" said Hope, after a while. "But perhaps thou deemest the friendship of so light a creature of small avail. Yet is my heart less stout because I have ever a song on my lips?"

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

Did I not vow to be thy fellow by my faith in the rainbow, which, though an aery phantom of tender flower-hued radiance, yet rides safely across the front of the storm, and marvellously raises the stricken heart of the foreboding earth. There are no places so dark but that my eyes can find the way back into the light which shines somewhere beyond all darkness. To thee likely there seemeth no end to this waste of marshes, but to my eyes it is but a passing shadow on the face of the fair world, which lieth all about it green and fruitful and singing, and glad with the happiness of men and women and babes and birds."

Yet, though Youth answered nothing, weighed down by his leaden thoughts, still the cheering of Hope



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

was not all cast away, and slowly the life began to stir within him once more, and the weariness to lift from his spirit. But, not yet, for any words of his friend, might the onward road seem good to him, but still would he wander about the melancholy pools, pondering sick fancies, and clinging to the shadowy places away from the sun. Nevertheless, there came a day when, for all his glooming, he was aware of a new softness in the sky beyond the marshes, and a far faint singing coming to him dreamlike out of the distance. Then Hope, that kept ever by his side, answered to his thought.

“It is Spring singing her new song out there in the sunlit world. It is so sweet that even the dead stir in their graves to listen. Yea! and thou shalt see anon that even a bloom shall steal



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

over these marshes of despair, and even a manner of music rise from their waters. Such magic is there in her voice, and such a fragrant fire is her breath."

And Youth watched and listened, and soon it was as Hope had said, and he was aware too that the darkness seemed to be rolling away from his heart, as when the clouds move with the first light of the returning day. Then warm tears welled up and glittered in his eyes, and Hope said softly:

"Shall we not go forth to meet the Spring, for I had a dream in the night that we met her walking in the lanes, and in her hands she brought thee a gift of healing and wonder, as though it were all the future days gathered up into a flower."

"Sweet friend and faithful," an-



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

swered Youth, "lead me whither thou wilt. I can say thee nay no more."

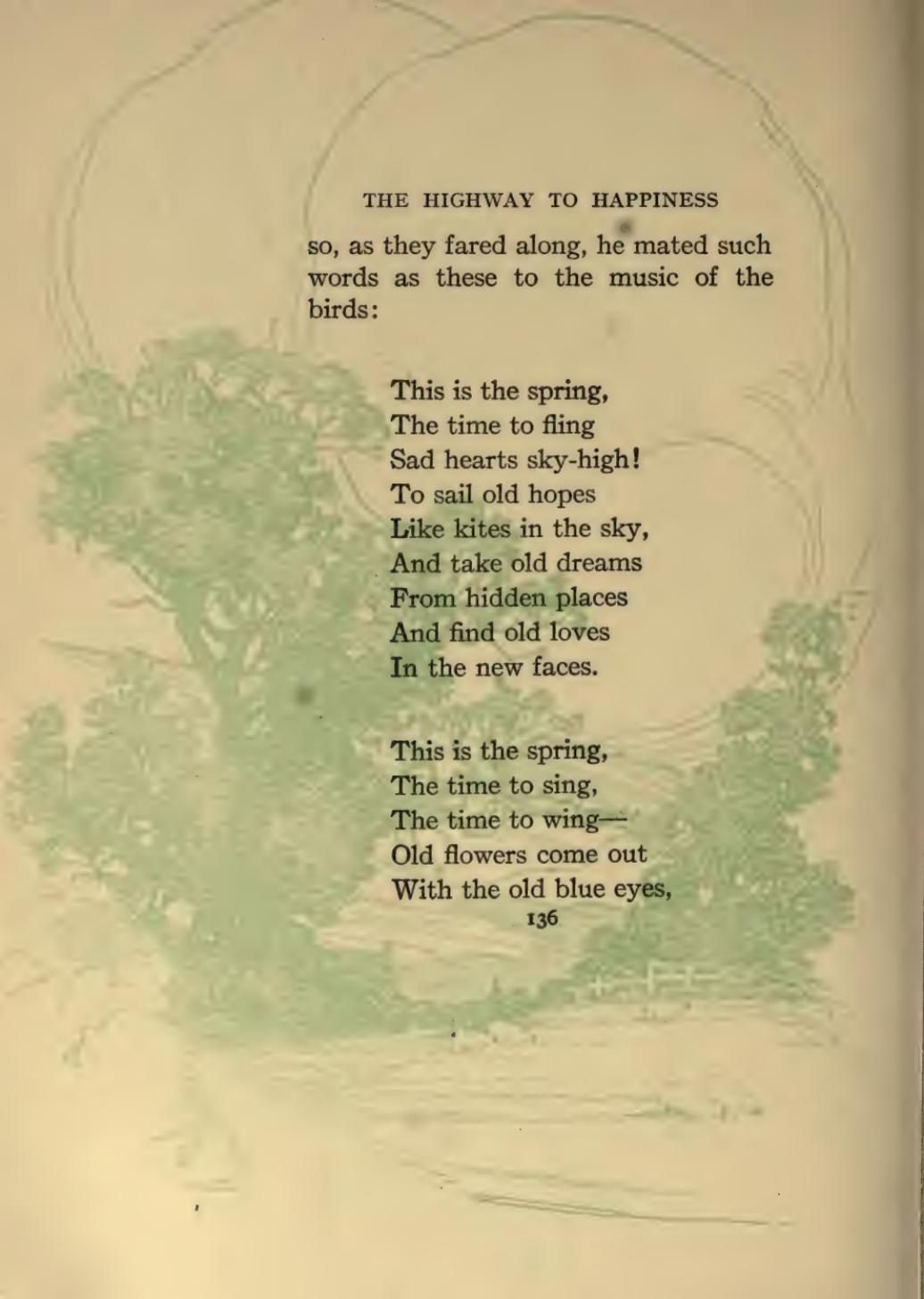
Thereat was Hope so joyous for his friend that he kissed him on the brow, while bright tears fell down his cheeks for very gladness.

"Now," said he, "shall all be well with thee once again." Then they arose straightway and began to journey together through the waste, and lo! it was a strange thing, that, though it had seemed before that there was no ending to its leaden pools, and thorny thickets, ere but a little while the turf began to stretch green and velvet beneath their feet, and flowers to bloom by the wayside; yet but a little further on dainty copses glistening with new leafage began to appear, with blue birds flitting in and out, busy and mirthful among the boughs. Very soon indeed it was that Youth, turning

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

his head, could see nothing of the swart wilderness any more, but all about them was only sunlit verdure, and a blithe warbling everywhere, and a balm filling the air with an innocent freshness sweeter than tongue can tell.

Through such a land fared Youth and Hope the days following, and every day the earth grew lovelier with the crowding of leaves in the woods, and the thickening of grass in the meadows, and the prospering of rush and reed along the water-courses. And everywhere were banners of blossom flung out across the world, and carpets of flowers blue, white and yellow, spread out as for the feet of a queen, and in every bush and brake unseen minstrels that piped and luted of her coming. Nor was it in Hope to keep silent when all the earth was singing,

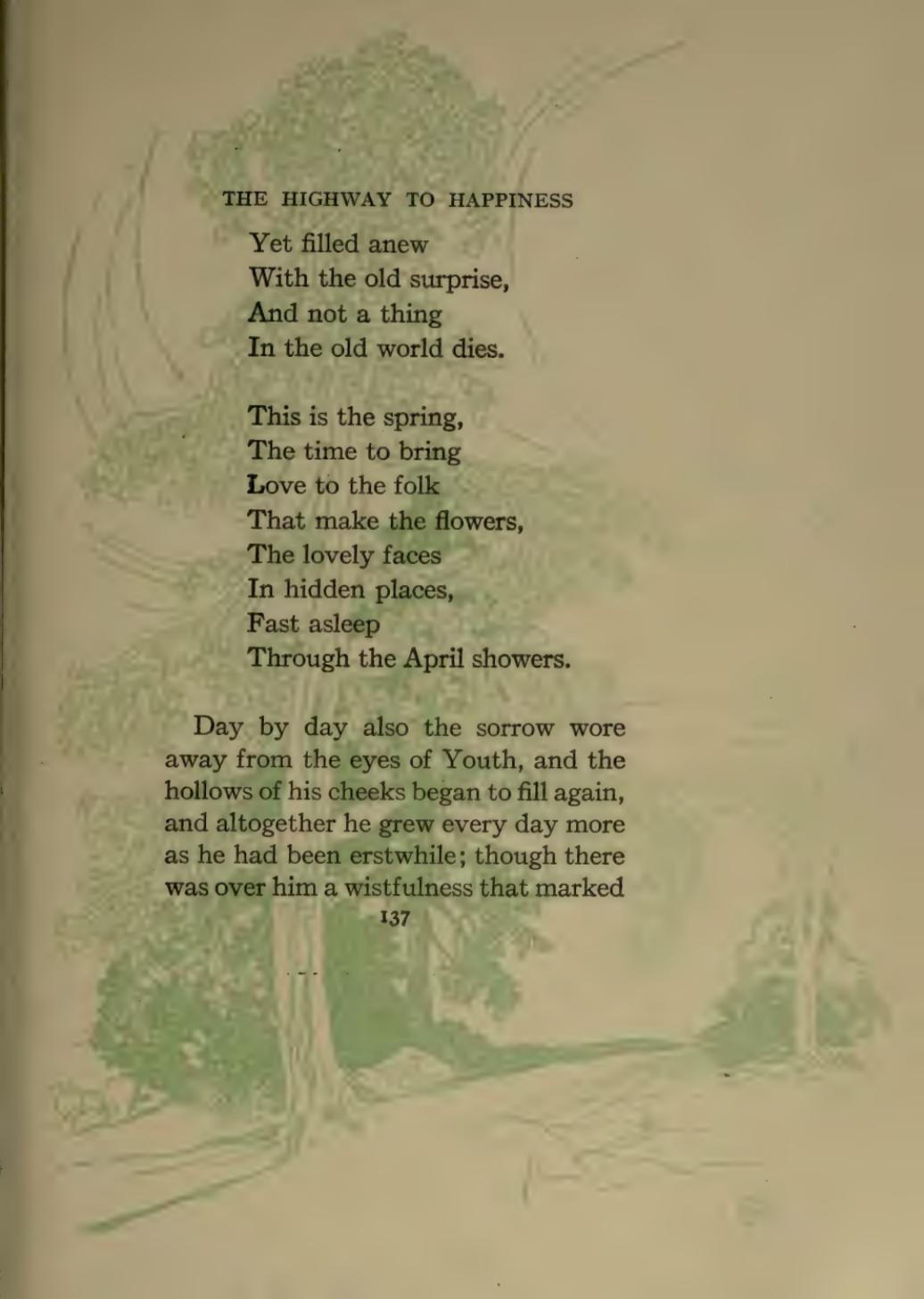


THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

so, as they fared along, he mated such words as these to the music of the birds:

This is the spring,
The time to fling
Sad hearts sky-high!
To sail old hopes
Like kites in the sky,
And take old dreams
From hidden places
And find old loves
In the new faces.

This is the spring,
The time to sing,
The time to wing—
Old flowers come out
With the old blue eyes,

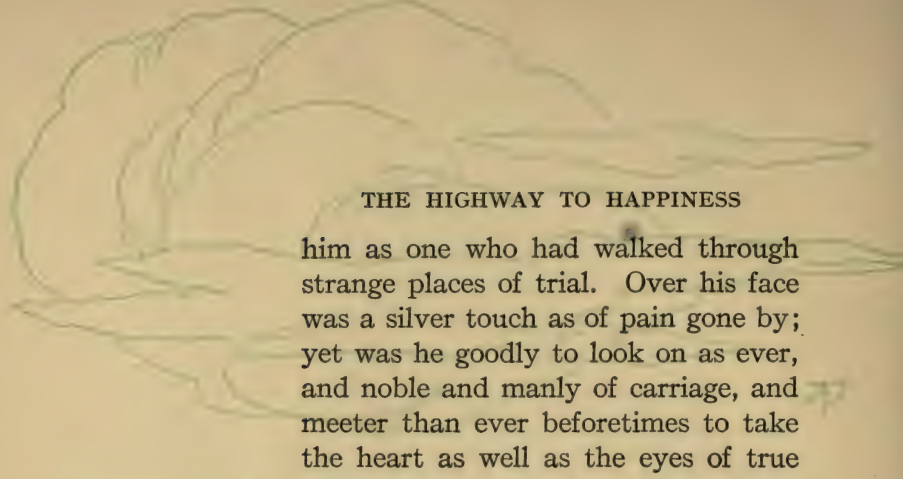


THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

Yet filled anew
With the old surprise,
And not a thing
In the old world dies.


This is the spring,
The time to bring
Love to the folk
That make the flowers,
The lovely faces
In hidden places,
Fast asleep
Through the April showers.

Day by day also the sorrow wore
away from the eyes of Youth, and the
hollows of his cheeks began to fill again,
and altogether he grew every day more
as he had been erstwhile; though there
was over him a wistfulness that marked

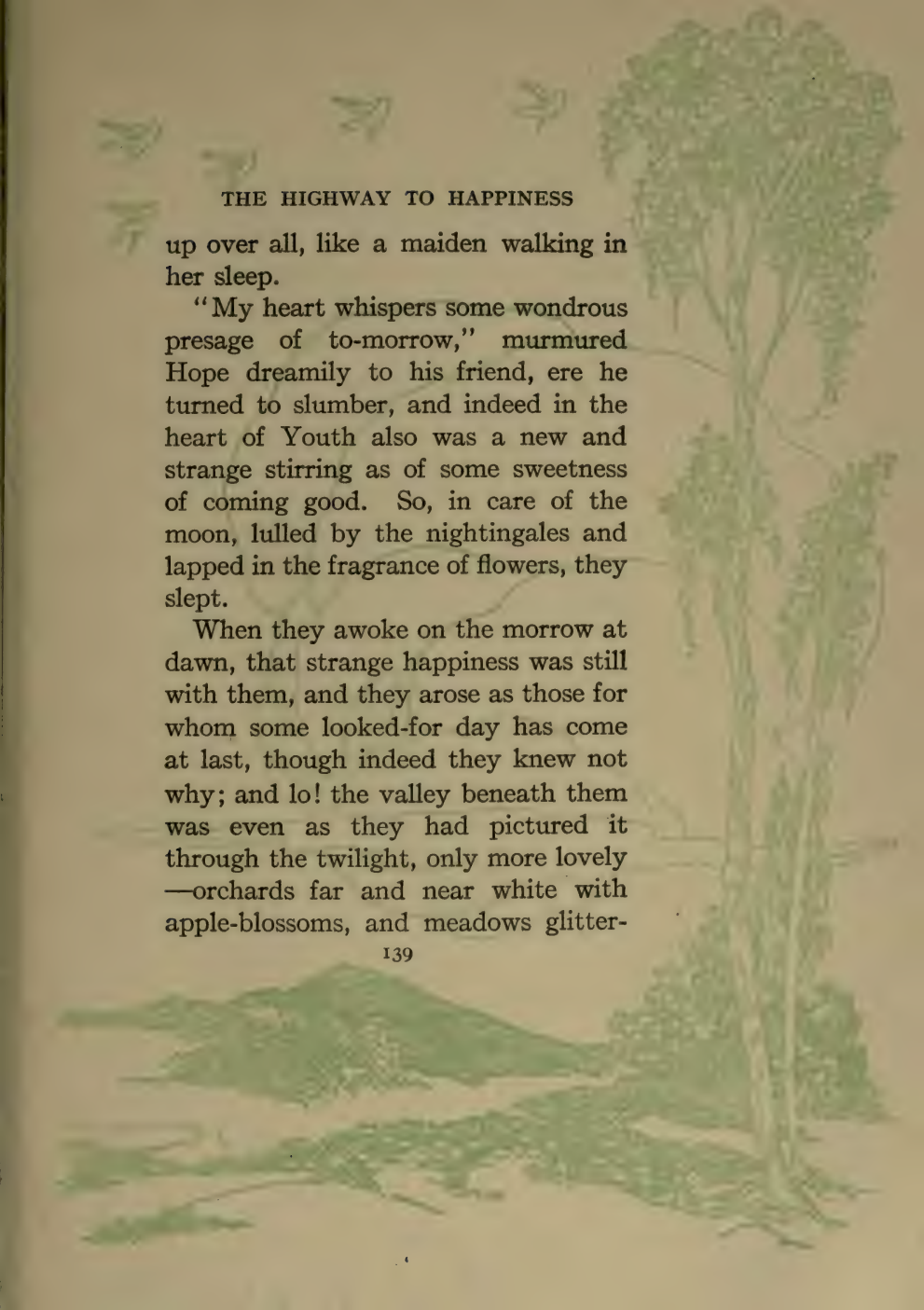


THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

him as one who had walked through strange places of trial. Over his face was a silver touch as of pain gone by; yet was he goodly to look on as ever, and noble and manly of carriage, and meeter than ever beforetimes to take the heart as well as the eyes of true women.



One night Youth and Hope laid themselves down to rest on the wooded slopes of a broad hill, and everywhere about them was the fragrance of violets and narcissus that grew in the clefts of the rocks, while beneath them, dimly seen in the twilight, stretched a wide valley that seemed like a tumbled sea of white and green, which they took to be orchards in blossom amid rolling pastures, and from this valley rose the singing of innumerable nightingales, while presently the faint lily-pale crescent of the young moon stole



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

up over all, like a maiden walking in her sleep.

“My heart whispers some wondrous presage of to-morrow,” murmured Hope dreamily to his friend, ere he turned to slumber, and indeed in the heart of Youth also was a new and strange stirring as of some sweetness of coming good. So, in care of the moon, lulled by the nightingales and lapped in the fragrance of flowers, they slept.

When they awoke on the morrow at dawn, that strange happiness was still with them, and they arose as those for whom some looked-for day has come at last, though indeed they knew not why; and lo! the valley beneath them was even as they had pictured it through the twilight, only more lovely—orchards far and near white with apple-blossoms, and meadows glitter-



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

ing with gold king-cups and softly-stealing streams, while here and there the chimney-smoke rose from a farmstead, and cattle were seen moving to pasture. And there came up from the valley a fragrance as from a bowl of roses, and a happy murmur of the confused sounds of life as from a hive of bees. As they stood and gazed down upon it from the woodside, an ancient peasant passed near them going up through the trees. His face seemed even as the valley, full of sunshine and calm, and, when the friends asked him the name of the valley, he answered them that it was the Valley of Peace.

"Then, surely," said Hope, "here at length is the end of thy journey, for who, having found this valley, would of his own will fare forth from it again?"

But Youth gazed in a dream, his

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

heart strangely welling with content, and he thought that, however fair other scenes of his journey had been, there was, as it were, a blessing lying upon the beauty of this valley that lay nowhere else upon the earth. So he and his friend passed down the hillside, and entered at length among the orchards which spread on every hand, like shimmering halls and corridors roofed in with sun-steeped blossom, the gnarled boles of the apple-trees being as the pillars, and the woven boughs as the rafters, and the grass underfoot as a tapestry of golden green, dappled and diapered with the soft flicker of sunshine and shadows. All was hushed and dream-like, and there was no sound save the murmur of happy insects, which seemed like the humming of the sunlight itself. So they went together as under a spell,



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

speaking not the one to the other.
But presently Hope said:

“Lo! where thy journey ends!”

There a little before them the orchard-trees fell away to make space for a fair garden, in the midst of which stood a goodly timbered house, not very great of size, nor yet small, but such as might suffice for the dwelling-place of Happiness. From the doorway came, through the garden, a straight path paved with grey stone and bordered with rose-trees, and down the pathway came a woman that seemed made of blossom and light and the blue sky. Over her loveliness lay that same look of blessing which it had seemed to Youth lay over the beauty of the valley itself. She smiled as she came, simply as a child, and kindly as some visitant from the heavenly places smiles on us in dreams of the night.

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

As Youth looked at her he saw again the simple woman from long ago with the babe at her breast, and again he saw the beautiful woman who lay dead by his doing with her babe and her lover at her side, and sorrow swept over him for all the old evil and uncleanness of himself, and he dared not look again upon the fair woman, but stood with his eyes bent upon the ground, shame and wonder doing battle within him. Yet he felt that she still came towards him, and presently he knew her standing by his side, and as in a dream he heard her speaking.

"Weary one," said she, "look up."

Then he took courage and raised again his eyes, and there stood she with her arms held out to him—as a mother holds out her arms for her babe, as a sister for her brother, as a woman for the man for whom she

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

must be such as theirs and all other love besides—yea! wife's love and God's love too. And she said:

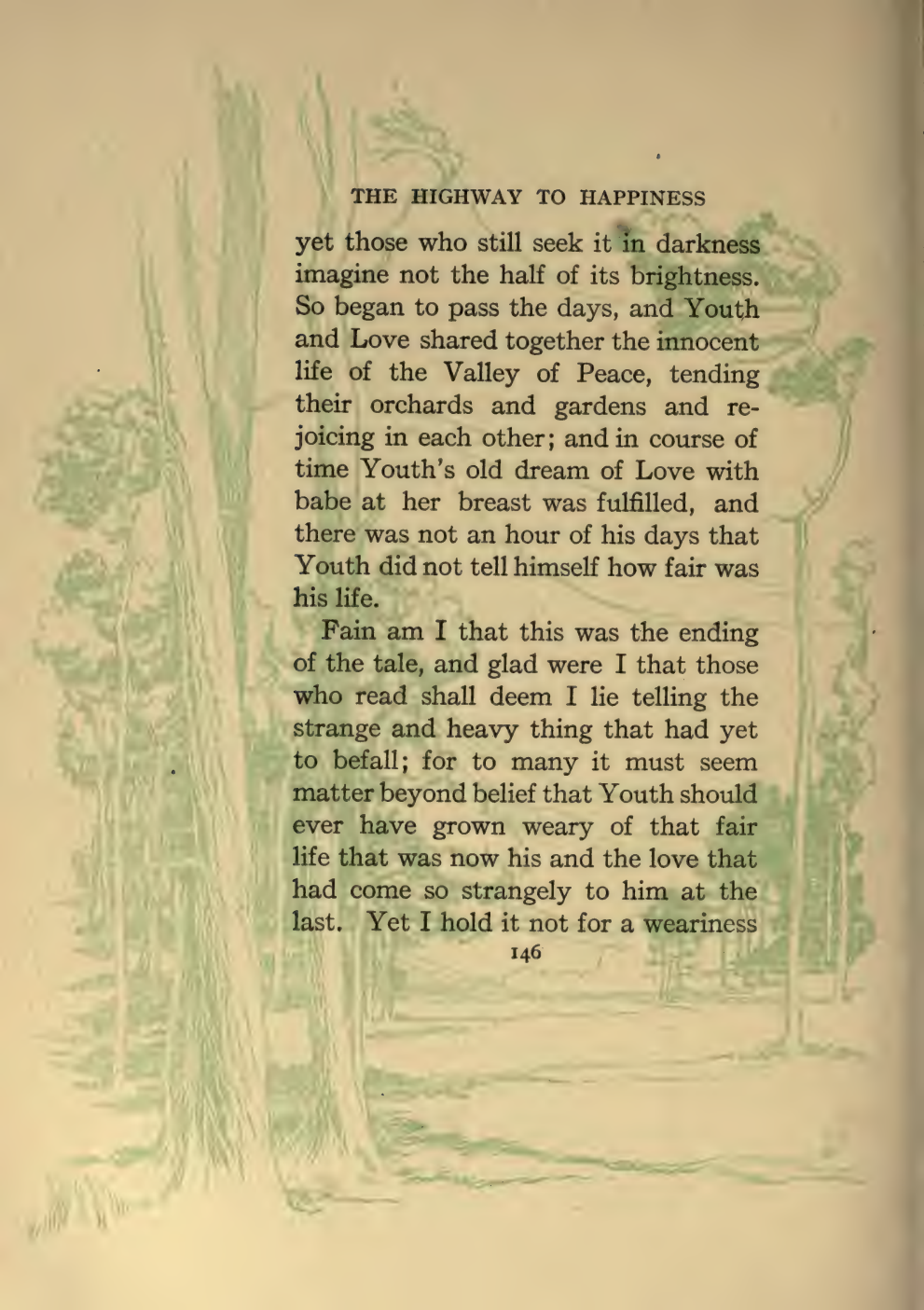
“Here is rest for thee, weary one, and joy also, and all understanding of the way, and all peace of the end.”

Then a great thankfulness welled up in the heart of Youth, and a great wonder that thus, by no doing of his own—whose doing, alas! had been only misdoing—so strange a goodness should have befallen him; and by no seeking of his own—whose seeking had been but a wild wandering—he should come thus marvellously to find. Surely, was his thought, a great mystery and a great mercy are behind every foot-step of the wayfarer in this world, and the name of the mystery and the mercy is Love—for he knew her to be Love, this fair woman that held out her arms to him, and beside whose

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

fairness the fairness of all other women he had known seemed but an unclean enchantment. The while he wondered, she still smiled upon him, as one who read all his thought without a word; and at length, finding no speech save the speech of his thankful eyes, he took her hand, and walked by her side up through the rose-trees toward the open door of the house. Ere they entered, he turned his head seeking his friend; but, while Love and he had stood together, Hope had stolen away into the orchard; yet could he hear his voice among the blossom singing of the spring.

Thus in the house of Love Youth found that Happiness he had set out so long ago to seek, and the peace and blessedness of their days together is beyond the telling. Those who have found the like will need no words of it,



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

yet those who still seek it in darkness imagine not the half of its brightness. So began to pass the days, and Youth and Love shared together the innocent life of the Valley of Peace, tending their orchards and gardens and rejoicing in each other; and in course of time Youth's old dream of Love with babe at her breast was fulfilled, and there was not an hour of his days that Youth did not tell himself how fair was his life.

Fain am I that this was the ending of the tale, and glad were I that those who read shall deem I lie telling the strange and heavy thing that had yet to befall; for to many it must seem matter beyond belief that Youth should ever have grown weary of that fair life that was now his and the love that had come so strangely to him at the last. Yet I hold it not for a weariness

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

in him, but a witchcraft—against which let other wayfarers not so much rail as cross themselves and take heed. Be it all as it may, there came a time to Youth amid the peace of his days, when, all unbidden, thoughts of the time that was past began to trouble the content of his heart, and not as things full of sorrow and evil, but as happenings that yet had in them somewhat that was fair. Yet, so soon as they arose, he thrust the thoughts from him, knowing well that they were but lying tricks of his mind; and at such times he would take his babe in his arms, and draw Love to his side, and laugh with them and know all the fulness of his joy. So would the thoughts pass, and for a long time come no more, yet anon suddenly come again, and yet again pass away. But it befell one spring morning, as he



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

walked alone in the orchard, listening to the happy singing of the birds, that there among the blossom stood a beautiful naked girl, with dark heavy locks hanging like clusters of purple grapes about her moon-white brows, and eyes of deep sea-green, glowing like soft flame far down under swaying water. For a moment of time she stood there smiling strangely on him, and then was suddenly gone once more, so that he said to himself that it was a phantom. Yet well he knew her for the beautiful witch who long ago had said, "I am the love that brings forgetfulness of love"; so all that day he went heavy hearted, and Love wondered at the shadow on his face. And again when the night fell and he slept on the bosom of Love, he awoke with a sudden cry, for it had seemed that upon his lips was a strange kiss, cool as snow

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

and hot as fruit on a sunny wall; while faintly from the darkness there seemed to come a far music as of nymphs and fawns dancing wildly under the moon.

Thus, as the spring days waxed lovelier would the hauntings come and go, but ever manfully he thrust them from him, telling himself how fair and goodly was his life, and how as the holy stars was Love by his side. Nor did Love divine aught of all this, but deemed that maybe it was but some little passing care. Yet, for all his battle, those evil shapes and sounds out of the past visited him more and more, and, for all his denying, they grew to seem sweet somehow again as of old. Yea! even in some hours it seemed as though his fair life with Love was a thing of little change, and that the days, glad as they were, were



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

ever the same, even one as the other. And sometimes in the night, as Love lay breathing tranquilly at his side, he would lie wakeful wondering what like was that strange kiss, and deeming it sweet to be done again, and long again to be out once more under the moon with the strange music. But ever he flushed with shame at the foulness of his thought, and was filled with fear and wonder at himself.

Then, one morning, he walked the orchard once more wrestling with himself, saying over and over how fair was his life, and how he was but a madman to house such fancies in his mind; and as he thus reasoned, walking to and fro, he seemed to hear a singing close by, and looking up—lo! Folly stood before him with her strange eyes as of old, merry and beckoning. Now she, of all the past, had been dearest to him, and

THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

as she beckoned to him a longing stirred in him for the old wildness of him and her; but he thrust it away from him, and again there was nothing but blossom where she stood. But it seemed as though her voice lingered behind in the air, and said only—"In the dawn."

But by this time Youth knew the doom that was on him, and that, battle with himself as he might, if not this day, yet another, he would do the evil thing that he loathed, and the madness that filled him with dread. So it befell that the next night, just at the coming of dawn, he raised himself from the side of Love where she slept, with her babe, and she felt not his stirring but slept on. Then he stood over her, with all the sadness of hell come back into his eyes, and kissed her pure brow. "Farewell the happiness of which I was not



THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

worthy," he murmured; and thereat he stole out into the orchard, where the mists still hung about the trees, and the birds were at their first faint sleepy piping; and suddenly as he came to the end of the orchard the sun rose over the edge of the valley, and smote all into a wondrous glitter and song. There stood Folly waiting him, with eyes like the fairy lights that dance over haunted pools. A little way off stood other shapes he knew, flower-naked, and others faun-faced and goat-footed. And they all set up a cry as they saw him, and ran towards him. A little while he stood and gazed across the orchard bright with dew, and listened to the birds. Then he turned to Folly, with lost unsmiling eyes, and took her hand, and went with her as a man goeth to his death. But as he did so, a scroll fell

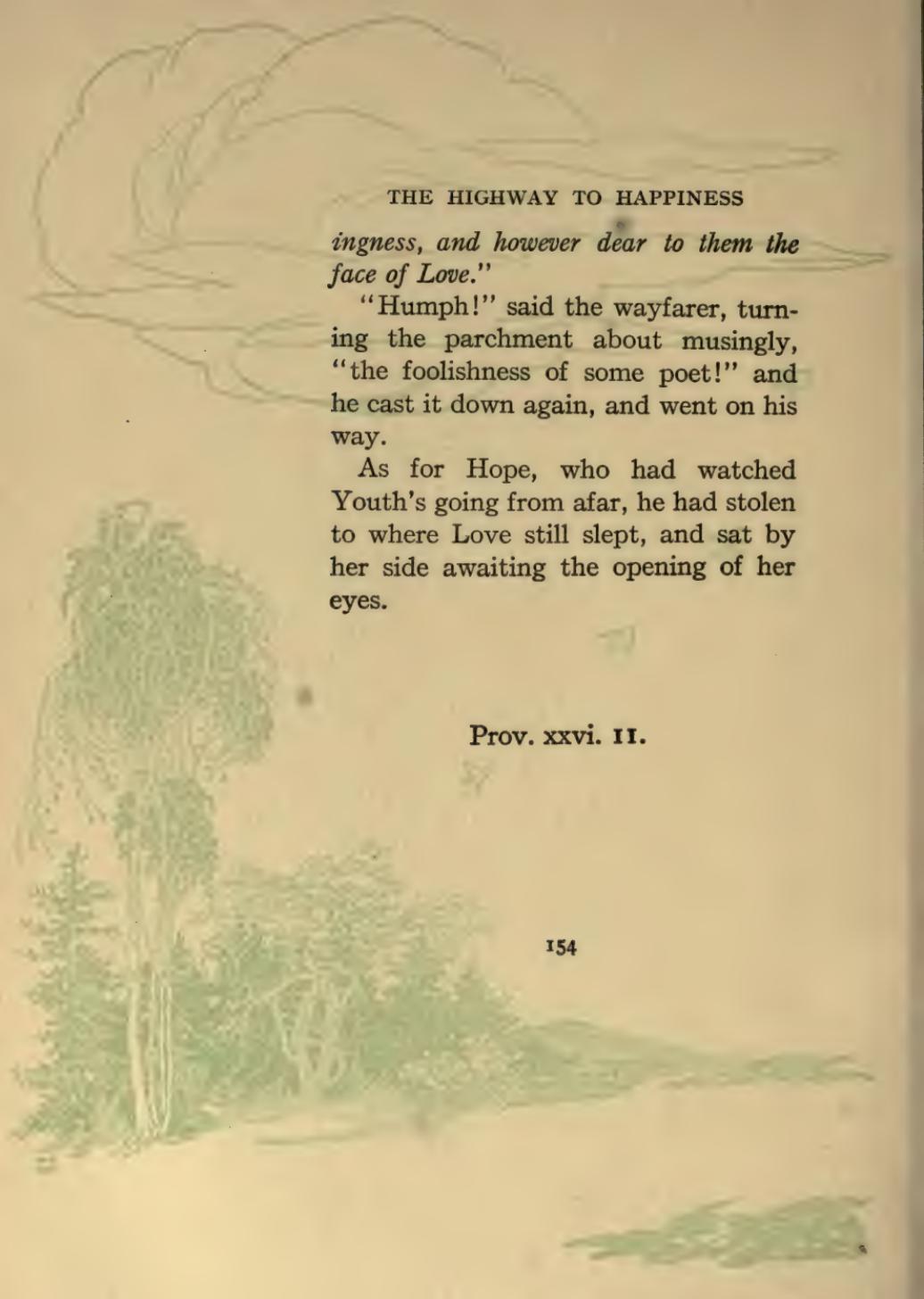
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

from his bosom. It was the scroll he ever carried, though he had not read in it for a great while.

"What is this," said Folly snatching it up from the ground. Then, as she looked into it, she laughed.

"Why! it is that old fool Wisdom!" she cried, and she tore it in pieces, and scattered it abroad.

Later one going by picked up a fragment, and read as he went, though understanding little of what he read, how "*Those*"—so went the words—"*who have drunk too deep of the evil sweets of the Valley of Pleasure and have lingered over long in the City of Folly may never, though they should at the last find it, rest content in the Valley of Peace, but a fever is in their blood for ever that drives them back to the old wildness, however weary they be thereof and wise concerning its noth-*



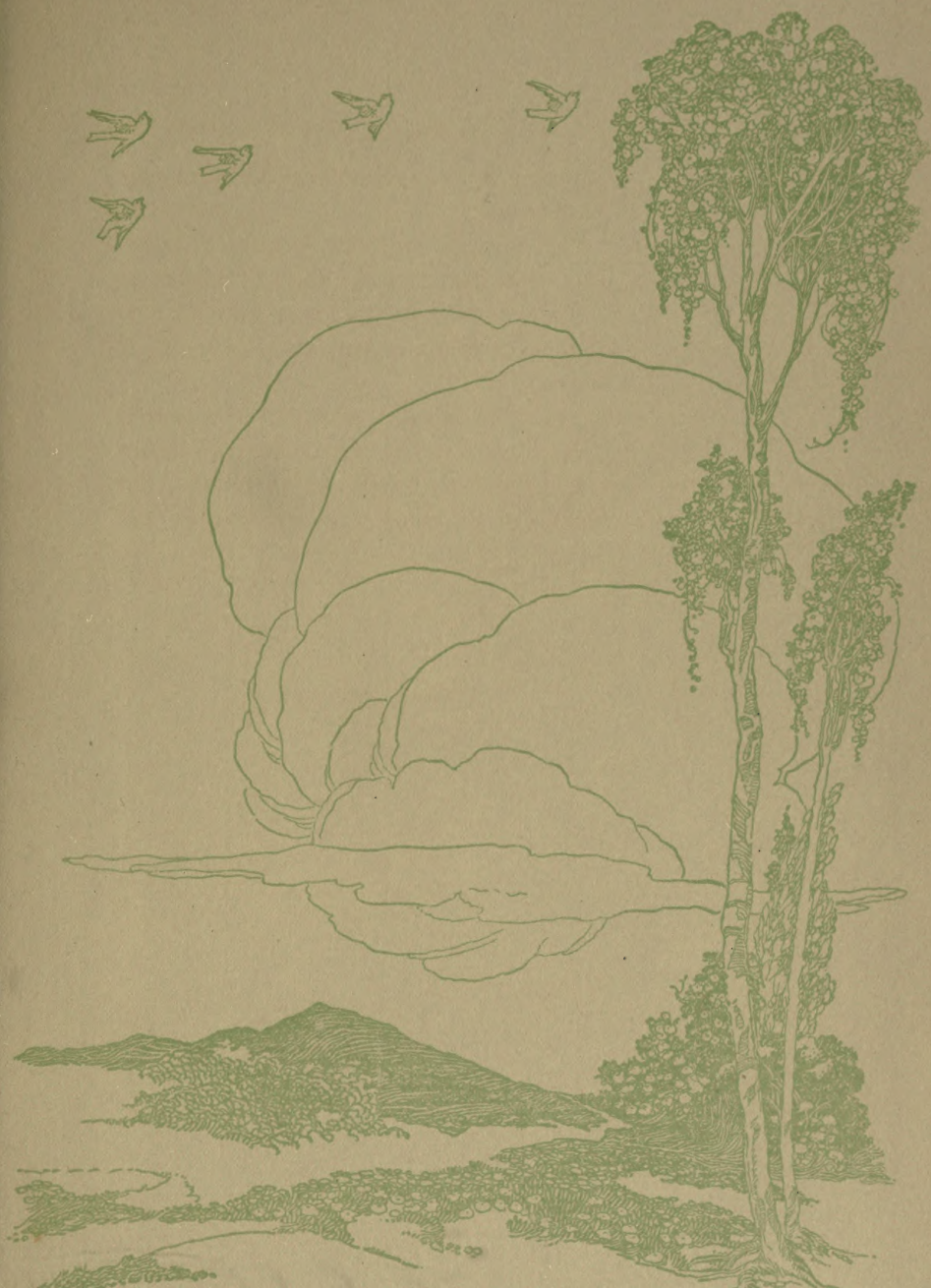
THE HIGHWAY TO HAPPINESS

ingness, and however dear to them the face of Love."

"Humph!" said the wayfarer, turning the parchment about musingly, "the foolishness of some poet!" and he cast it down again, and went on his way.

As for Hope, who had watched Youth's going from afar, he had stolen to where Love still slept, and sat by her side awaiting the opening of her eyes.

Prov. xxvi. 11.





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